

# sojourners

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Faith in Action for Social Justice

ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

40

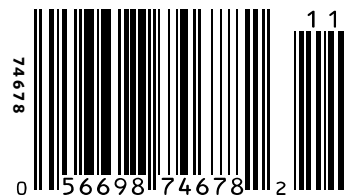


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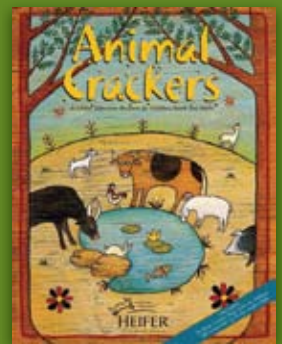
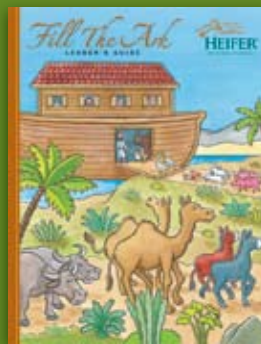
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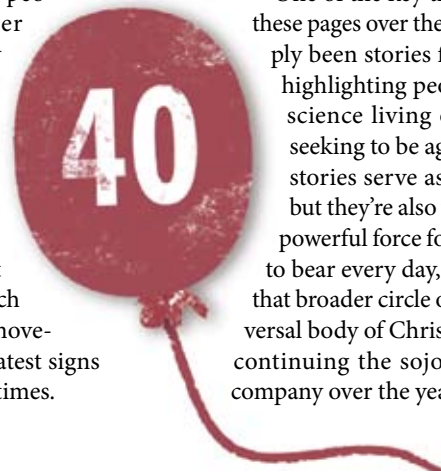




**FORTY YEARS IS** a long time for any endeavor, but in the precarious world of small nonprofits, reaching that milestone is almost a miracle. And when you're a magazine with a strong commitment to biblically based justice—that is, when you insist on talking about “religion and politics” in polite company—it's no wonder that we're convinced that grace, more than anything of our own doing, is why we're still going strong four decades into the journey.

From the beginning, as Jim Wallis explains in his cover feature, the magazine grew out of a community—both the

physical community of people who came together at a Midwest seminary and the broader body of friends, supporters, and collaborators across the country and around the world. That continues to be true, and the strength of that wider community—which often looks a lot like a movement—is one of the greatest signs of hope in our troubled times.



One of the key things we've offered in these pages over the past 40 years has simply been stories from that movement, highlighting people of faith and conscience living out their beliefs and seeking to be agents of change. These stories serve as models for all of us, but they're also vivid reminders of the powerful force for good that is brought to bear every day, all over the world, by that broader circle of friends, aka the universal body of Christ. We look forward to continuing the sojourn with such good company over the years ahead. ■

## Letters

### GOOD WORD

Thank you for the interview with Rep. Walter Jones, “A Convert to Peace” (September-October 2011). Our government is truly disappointing in these past years and cynicism is rampant. This article was a breath of fresh air: There truly are those taking stands that are not popular, but are looking after the greater good.

**Steve Roe**  
*Sequim, Washington*

### MILITARY THINKING

Claire Lorentzen's article against the ROTC (“Studying War More?” September-October 2011) is intolerant. Not needing a military at all is a pipe dream. Nobody is forced to join ROTC. I have been in combat under various types of officers. Believe me, having a commanding officer that learned to think from a college like Stanford can make a world of difference to the troops versus an officer from an inferior, small-time, “good old boy” college.

**John Rensen**  
*Potter Valley, California*

### JUDGING NOT

Re: “Men Behaving Badly” (by Jim Wallis, August 2011): I recall the story of King David and Bathsheba. David's lust led to the murder of Bathsheba's husband, yet David was described as “a man after God's heart.” He did, of course, eventually repent after being confronted, and also suffered consequences. What he did was worse than what any of the men you mentioned did. In the

**Pastor Stone of Heartsong Church shows the brotherly Christian love we owe to all.** —David Friesen, Winkler, Manitoba

case of Dominique Strauss-Kahn, it now appears that the accusations against him were false, but he was forced to resign anyway. [Editors' Note: Prosecutors determined that the legal case against Strauss-Kahn was weak, not that the accusations were false.] The other men, except Donald Trump and Arnold Schwarzenegger, have issued public apologies, and I believe it is up to God, not us, to determine their sincerity. We must heed the biblical warning against casting the first stone.

**Philip Washburn**  
*Fredericksburg, Virginia*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT?

As a teacher for the Chicago Public Schools, I found your decision to run an advertisement from StudentsFirst.org (September-October 2011) troubling. The StudentsFirst mantra is “accountability,” and it locates the source of almost everything wrong with public education at the feet of unions who protect “incompetent” teachers. But for more than a year now, Michelle Rhee, the former chancellor of Washington, D.C.'s public schools who now runs StudentsFirst, has largely refused to address the cheating scandal that occurred on her watch.

In D.C., 41 schools had suspiciously high test scores. In one classroom 97 percent of

standardized test answer erasures were wrong to right. When the District finally investigated, only eight schools were investigated. If Rhee is as hypocritical about such a core value as integrity in her current organization, it raises questions about the ethics of running her organization's advertisements.

**Mark Datema Lipscomb**  
*Chicago, Illinois*

### PERIL PRECISION

Gene Luen Yang's otherwise enjoyable “Telling the Old, Old Story” (September-October 2011) inaccurately states that Moses was set on a river in a reed basket “to escape a besieged city.” Exodus clearly indicates that Moses' family was trying to save him from Pharaoh's decree that all male Hebrew babies be cast into the river (without the benefit of a flotation device). There was no siege. The article also states that Superman's family sent him away “to escape a besieged planet”; actually, the planet Krypton was in danger of exploding.

**Laura Palmberg**  
*Hollywood, Florida*

**Letters**, *Sojourners*, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 or [letters@sojo.net](mailto:letters@sojo.net). Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM WALLIS

# What is 'Biblical Politics'?



**SOJOURNERS HAS** always tried to understand and advocate for “biblical politics.” But what does that mean now, especially as we approach another major election?

I was talking the other day to a Christian leader who has given his life to working with the poor. His approach is very grassroots—he lives in a poor, virtually all-minority community and provides basic services for low-income people. He said, “If you work with and for the poor, you inevitably run into *injustice*.”

In other words, poverty isn’t caused by accident. There are unjust systems and structures that create and perpetuate poverty and human suffering. And service alone is never enough; working to change

Wesleyan convert who made ending slavery the mission of his life. But I’ve always thought that the movie focused too much on the man and not enough on the movement that swept the United Kingdom and made the political victory possible.

Likewise, it was more than the inspiring rhetoric of King that propelled the civil rights movement. It was the Birmingham campaign, the dramatic events in Selma, and the march to Montgomery that focused the nation’s attention and led to important legislative actions.

It takes a movement to change politics. Change doesn’t ever start in Washington, but if public momentum can be built among millions of people, it eventually arrives in the nation’s capital.

THIS IS WHAT the Bible teaches us. The scriptures reveal a God of justice, not only a God of charity. Words such as oppression and justice fill the Bible. The most common objects of the prophets’ judgments are kings, rulers, judges, employers—the rich and the powerful in charge of the world’s governments, courts, economies, systems, and structures. When those who are in charge mistreat the poor and vulnerable, say the scriptures, it is not just unkind but also wrong and unjust, and it makes God angry.

The subjects of the scriptures’ concern are always the widow and the orphan, the poor and oppressed, the victims of courts or unscrupulous employers, debtors whose debts need to be forgiven, strangers in the land who need to be welcomed. And the topics of the prophets’ messages to the powerful are things like land, labor, capital, judicial decisions, employer practices, rulers’ dictates, and the decisions of the powerful—all the stuff of politics.

I believe that makes very suspect those who want to privatize

most of these very public decisions, who claim to trust “the market” to work things out, who want to leave the powerful alone and the corporate elites unregulated and to relegate solving poverty to private charity, and who want to further reduce political accountability on those who rule the economy and society by “making government so small it can be drowned in a bathtub,” as they proudly claim as their goal. The question should never be just about “big” or “small” government, but rather about effective and smart government that has the ability to hold both wealth and power accountable to the common good.

But biblical politics is never only about the candidates either, and some have made that mistake in recent elections. Putting one’s hopes in political candidates and parties has only led to disappointment, frustration, and dangerous cynicism. There are systems and structures that undergird and shape the limits of the political agenda, and challenging those limits to get to root causes and real solutions is always the prophetic task. It is always movements that “change the wind,” and only a change in the political wind can change political policies in Washington.

People of faith, at our best, are the ultimate independents, engaged in politics only because of those moral issues that command our attention and willing to challenge all political sides on behalf of them. Moral independents will change politics more than will religious partisans, who make compromises on behalf of electoral victories. Fighting for justice, not partisan political goals, is the core of biblical politics—and that will continue to be our vocation at Sojourners. ■

*Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners.*

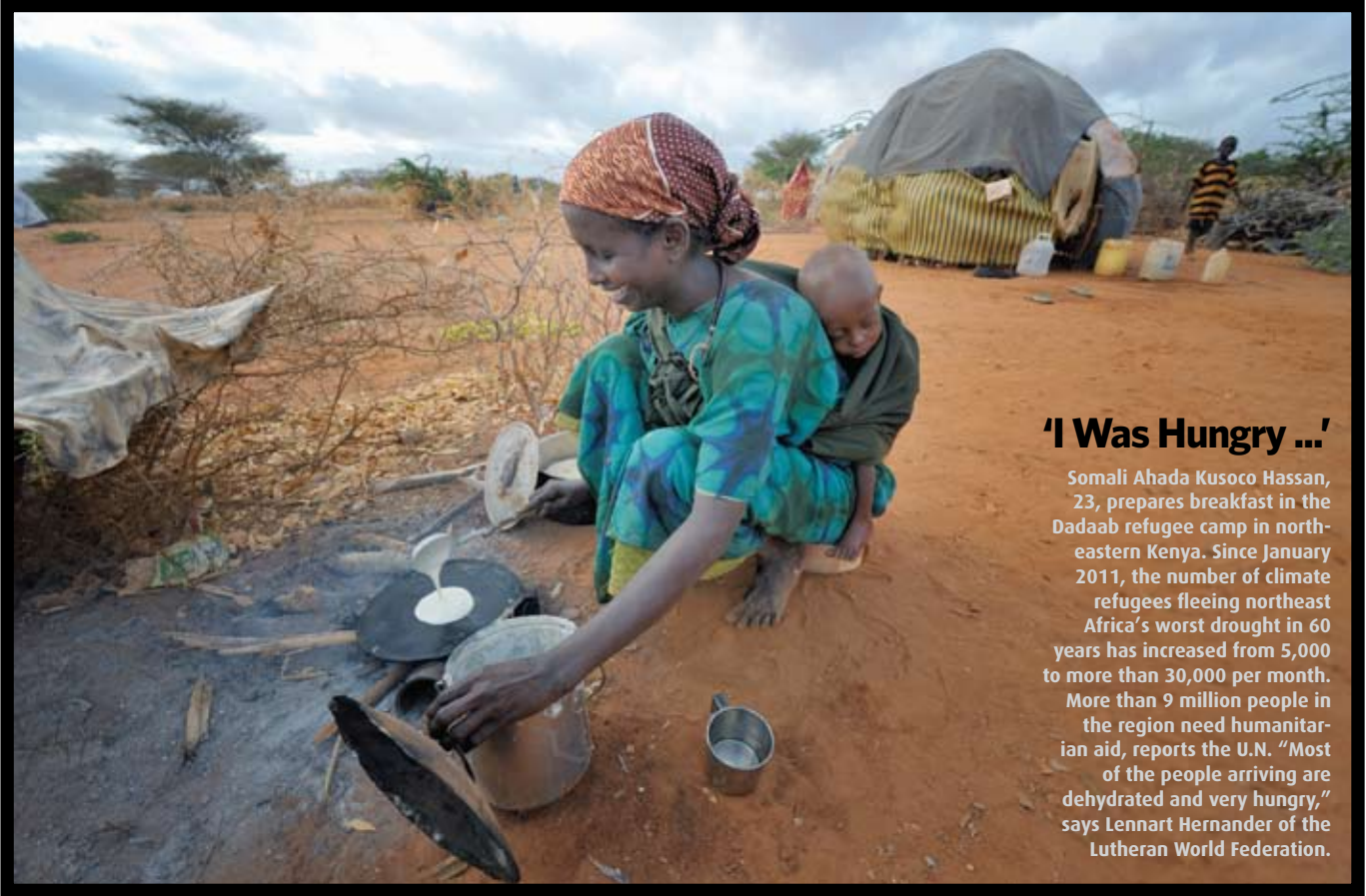
People of faith, at our best,  
are the ultimate independents.

both the attitudes and institutional arrangements that cause poverty is required.

To change injustice, you must confront politics. British abolitionist William Wilberforce, for example, didn’t only call upon English Christians to release slaves; he wanted to *end* the slave trade, and that required a long political campaign. Martin Luther King Jr. wasn’t content to only ask U.S. Christians not to personally practice discrimination against black people; he understood that the nation needed a civil rights law and a voting rights act. Both took leadership from the White House and votes in Congress. All these changes took politics to accomplish.

Another friend of mine recently told me that she had watched the powerful movie about Wilberforce, *Amazing Grace*, five times this year and was deeply inspired. I was too when I first watched the story of the





## 'I Was Hungry ...'

Somali Ahada Kusoco Hassan, 23, prepares breakfast in the Dadaab refugee camp in northeastern Kenya. Since January 2011, the number of climate refugees fleeing northeast Africa's worst drought in 60 years has increased from 5,000 to more than 30,000 per month. More than 9 million people in the region need humanitarian aid, reports the U.N. "Most of the people arriving are dehydrated and very hungry," says Lennart Hernander of the Lutheran World Federation.

By David Hilfiker

## The Democracy Deficit

Doomsday threats and Wall Street influence erode U.S. government for the people.

**THIS PAST SUMMER'S** wholly manufactured "debt crisis" contains important lessons for those concerned about the poor. Right-wing Republicans committed to radically cutting government services, including Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare, misused a usually routine vote about raising the national debt ceiling, the amount of money the Treasury Department is allowed to borrow to pay its bills. Since everyone knew our bills would have to be paid and the debt ceiling eventually raised, the ceiling wasn't the point. Cutting government spending was.

As damaging as the specific budget cuts will be, however, the implications of the process are much wider.

First, in addition to the agreed-upon \$2.1 trillion in government spending cuts, more

are virtually certain. Most economists state that the initial government financial stimulus two years ago was inadequate to revive the economy; most also acknowledge that another, similar or greater, stimulus is nec-

requires that if the deficit must be reduced and income can't be increased, spending must be cut even more. And if history is any guide, the hardest hit will be the poor.

The second lesson relates to added gov-

## Private companies attempted to force the U.S. to pass legislation, under threat of economic disaster.

essary and that now is absolutely the wrong time to decrease government expenditures. Despite that, President Obama and a majority of Congress have accepted without question the need to reduce the deficit immediately. Republicans have absolutely ruled out significant tax increases. Given their willingness to threaten the country's economic stability, new taxes are unlikely. So simple logic

ernment dysfunction that weakens our democracy: Threats of significant economic damage are now acceptable bargaining tools. As politicians readily acknowledged, the threat worked so well it will be used again. Normal congressional procedure calls for spending negotiations to go through the budget process, which includes opportunity for thorough debate and—most



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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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important—citizen input. Polls in the weeks before the debt ceiling deal revealed that about 70 percent of Americans favored tax increases on the wealthy. Yet despite the polls and expert economic advice, radical Republicans held the financial integrity of the United States hostage to an anti-democratic demand for overall cuts without tax increases.

The third lesson, hardly remarked upon in the media, is that international corporate finance made a move toward undermining American political independence. Before the resolution of the crisis, the credit ratings agency Standard & Poor's (S&P) threatened to downgrade the U.S. government's credit rating not only if Congress failed to raise the debt limit, but also if the agreement did not contain at least a \$4 trillion reduction in the deficit over the next 10 years. Moody's (another credit rating agency) released a similar statement, though without mentioning a specific amount. S&P followed up on its threat and lowered the rating; if the other two main agencies had followed suit, this could have raised the interest rates the government would have to pay on its loans, creating billions of dollars in annual expenses.

The purpose of the agencies is to determine the likelihood that bondholders will get

their money back. Even after the crisis, investors still flocked to buy U.S. Treasury bonds as the safest in the world. So why the threats of downgrade?

It's true that S&P's downgrading has had little noticeable effect and that Moody's didn't carry out its threat, despite an agreement that didn't meet its implied requirements. But notice what just happened. *Private* companies publicly attempted to force the U.S. to pass specific legislation, under threat of economic disaster. For those of us marking the decline of the American empire, these were significant steps in the increasing dominance of global finance. They will add to pressure for more spending cuts and, once again, the poor will suffer.

Let's not bury our heads in the sand. A Supreme Court decision giving corporations unlimited political influence, the overwhelming power of media to influence public opinion, and congressional decision-making yielding to threats: These are all signs that our democracy is trickling away. ■

*David Hilfiker writes about economics, politics, faith, and the decline of the American empire. He is a member of the Eighth Day Faith Community and lives in Washington, D.C.*

By Tom Getman

## Holy Land Farce

Glenn Beck's exploitative event in Israel ignored justice and U.S. public opinion.

**GLENN BECK'S THREE-DAY** "Rally to Restore Courage" in Jerusalem in August was an exercise in "exploiting Israel" in an effort at "restoring his credibility," according to M.J. Rosenberg of Media Matters Action Network. Beck's pilgrimage pledged to support Israel, a nation that Beck portrayed as challenged by misguided critics and "Islamic socialism." Fusing entertainment and marketing, Beck promised the hundreds of fellow-travelers who would buy tickets for the event's August 24 keynote a "life-changing, and I think planet course-altering, event" that "could be miraculous." As it turned out, at the keynote he essentially declared himself founder of a global movement to take back the phrase "human rights" and stand up for "our responsibilities to our fellow man [sic]."

Ironically, Beck chose to do so on behalf of a country where human rights violations are severe. In reality the Israeli-Palestinian "peace process" has become a "pieces process" of land seizures and displacement. Upward of 350,000 settlers in the Occupied Territories receive generous government housing subsidies, tax breaks, infrastructure, and security, all of which markedly reduce resources available to municipalities inside Israel proper. That's just one source of frustration driving the recent street protests in Israel.

Public discourse is threatened when there is no critique of Israeli policies and Christian Zionist prejudices. Land heresy ("it is all ours") and xenophobia ("all Palestinians want to destroy us") fuel the illegal occupation of Palestinian and Bedouin land. This, and other oppression by a fragile Israeli

## From the Archives

Fall 1971 (Vol.1., No.1)

### Who Are We?

**WE ARE PEOPLE** who just a year ago began meeting together, attracted by our mutual rejection of the permeating American ethos and our mutual belief that the alternative lay somewhere in radical obedience to Jesus Christ. We were a small group of university strike leaders, seminarians, whites, blacks, college students, professors, and artists who organized teach-ins, a free university, and community involvement to develop and execute our ideas. We grew.

We grew because of a need for such a movement, not because of efficient fundraising, organization, eloquent speech, or charismatic leadership. We are a chief-less movement from two tribes: Some of us as student radicals discovered that our historical and social analysis was able to destroy institutional Christianity because of its American, nationalistic captivity but by that same historical analysis found Jesus of Nazareth to be an ally, a liberator, a Lord; others of us began with faith in Jesus Christ and found a value system in the New Testament demanding absolute discipleship and ethical lifestyle and leading us to an identification with the prophetic movements of our generation ...

We are a grassroots coalition calling for people committed to the revolutionary Christian message that is distinctively post-American, that changes people's lives and generates a radical commitment to social justice which serves as the basis for social liberation. Serve the Lord. Serve the People. ■

*This article by the editors ran in the first issue of The Post American, the precursor to Sojourners.*



coalition government, is supported by \$3 billion in annual U.S. aid.

Yet in the U.S., protecting Israel ranks relatively low among the public's Middle East priorities—after preventing terrorism, lowering oil prices, preventing attacks on civilians, and spreading democracy, according to a survey this spring by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Even 49 percent of Republicans think it should not be a “very important” goal to defend Israel.

Only 34 percent of mainline Protestants and 36 percent of Catholics believe protecting Israel should be “very important,” and there are an increasing number of evangelicals sensitive to Palestinian suffering. More than 50 percent of 2,000 world evangelicals polled at the Third Lausanne Conference of World Evangelization in Cape Town last year said they sympathized equally with both Israel and Palestine, with only three in 10 U.S. respondents stating a greater loyalty to Israel. A shift in thinking among evangelical leaders follows patient advocacy by independent organizations and churches; a number of films such as *With God on our Side*, *Little Town of Bethlehem*, *Lemon Tree*, and *Budrus* have brought awareness of the area's injustices

By Toya Richards

## Compassion That Works

**The Housing First approach to homelessness is more humane—and cheaper—than older models.**

**FOR MORE THAN** 10 years, Carmen lived on the streets around Omaha, Nebraska. Suffering from cancer and partly cut off from her family, she was a stark example of the chronically homeless people who exist all across the United States.

But in October 2010, Carmen moved into a home, where she has successfully remained since. Hers is a story of what is happening in communities nationwide that are taking part in the 100,000 Homes campaign, whose goal is to permanently house 100,000 highly vulnerable, long-term homeless individuals and families by July 2013. To date, roughly 10,700 have been housed.

The campaign, coordinated by the anti-homelessness nonprofit Community Solutions, is trying to assist “those people who we know are mostly likely to die on the street,” says Jake Maguire, the organization's

and nonviolent responses to them.

Pilgrims making a whistle stop in the Holy Land, as Beck did, face a grave trap. As the adage goes, “When in Jerusalem a week, you know the solution for peace; after a month, you have doubts; but after a year, you have no idea how to move things in a positive direction.” Beck was just the latest to offer quick-fix solutions, ignoring advice and polling data before his event. A trusted friend present at the final rally told me, “It was clearly a clown show—however, a deeply offensive and recklessly provocative one.”

Beck skirted the edge of dangerous self-delusion by comparing himself to the heroic Dietrich Bonhoeffer and by daring to say that “possibly for the first time in man's [sic] history, God will remember” what God's group of modern-day crusaders is doing in the Holy Land.

Sadly, Beck missed an opportunity to call all the children of Abraham together to find the road to mercy and justice.

*Tom Getman served as Sen. Mark Hatfield's legislative director from 1976 to 1985 and with World Vision for 25 years, including five years as national director in Jerusalem.*

communications director. Using a “vulnerability index,” communities survey their homeless populations. Factors they are looking for include whether a person has been homeless for at least six months and whether the person is suffering from a chronic physical condition, a mental illness, and an active substance abuse problem all at the same time. Maguire says that so far there have been more than 21,000 surveys done in 38 communities nationwide.

The 100,000 Homes campaign utilizes the Housing First model, pioneered by Dr. Sam Tsemberis, which asserts that stable housing is the primary need of the homeless; once that is established, other issues can be addressed. The alternative philosophy that before we can get the homeless off the street we have to help them get clean, or get a job, or get healthy doesn't work,



Maguire says. Under that model, “no one ever got housed.” In contrast, “housing is a very effective response to the crisis of homelessness.” In addition to being “humane and effective,” the approach is “much, much cheaper than allowing people to remain homeless.”

Linda Kaufman, a field organizer for the 100,000 Homes campaign and an Episcopal priest, concurs. She cites 11 different studies that show that moving from the street to permanent, supportive housing contributes to a drop of 60 percent in Medicaid costs. For example, Kaufman explains, if a doctor tells a person living on the street who has a bad cold to go home and rest, that person can easily end up in the hospital with pneumonia.

The Housing First model was endorsed by the federal government under the Bush administration, an endorsement continued in the Obama administration’s comprehensive strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness.

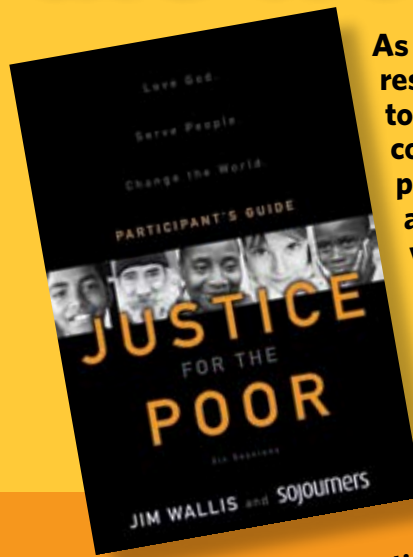
In the Omaha area, where Carmen received help, the 100,000 Homes campaign has been spearheaded by Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless (MACCH), a coalition that describes its aims as uniting “the efforts of shelter, housing, supportive services, and faith-based organizations that serve homeless and near-homeless individuals and families.”

A local team surveyed 471 people in three counties last October and identified 176 as high-risk, says the group’s director, Erin Porterfield. Today, “we continue to add people to that list,” she says. So far, they have housed 78.

Porterfield says they found “the solution to homelessness is not rocket science; it’s housing immediately.” Then, after people have been housed, “we stick with them.” Framing homelessness as a public health issue and then implementing “long-lasting community change” is the key, according to Porterfield: “This has changed the way we do things.” ■

**Toya Richards** owns *Richards Hill Communications* in Louisville, Kentucky, and is a M.Div. student at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. For more on the 100,000 Homes Campaign, visit [www.100khomes.org](http://www.100khomes.org).

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## The Roots of Terror

**ON FRIDAY, JULY 22,** Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik bombed government buildings in Oslo, then attacked a youth Labor Party camp on Utoya Island, killing 74 people. Dozens and dozens of young adults, emerging leaders, were brutally murdered at his hands, many while running or swimming for their lives.

We didn't have to wonder long about why Breivik committed his crimes. He provided a 1,500-page manifesto, through which it became known the attacks were based in anti-Muslim, rightist hatred, committed by a man who said he feared for the future of his country at the hands of "multiculturalist" liberals and an increasingly large Muslim population.

In the following weeks, it became clear that Breivik took inspiration from none other than America's own anti-Muslim rightists, who claim to fear for the future of their country for the same reasons. This group includes Pamela Geller, a staunch opponent of the Park 51 community center in lower Manhattan who writes an influential blog, *Atlas Shrugs*, and Robert Spencer, a pro-

### The Oslo shooter took inspiration from America's own anti-Muslim rightists.

lific author who also directs the anti-Islam blog *Jihad Watch*.

Breivik quotes extensively from these two and others in the growing anti-Islam blogosphere in his manifesto, where he describes his inspiration for the attacks. He self-identifies as a Christian. "I prayed to God," Breivik writes, to "ensure that the warriors fighting for the preservation of European Christendom prevailed."

Geller, who appears to make a living off of spreading misinformation



Christian cleric Anne Marie Tronvik, left, and Senaid Kobilica of the Islamic Council of Norway at the funeral of a victim of the July 22 Oslo attacks.

about Islam and trying to tie the religion to those who twist it to justify heinous crimes, responded, "I found very disturbing to hear the number of times [newscasters] use the word 'Christian.' They would never dare refer to religion when it is jihad, and this attack had nothing to do with Christianity."

I agree with one part of this statement: The attack had nothing to do with Christianity. Just as Pastor Terry Jones, who stirred up controversy last September by threatening to burn Qurans, does not represent Christianity or the Christians that I know and am proud to call friends, neither does Breivik. But we can't ignore Breivik's explicit manifesto dripping with fear, intolerance, and ignorance of what it means to be a Christian, Muslim, or European in the 21st century.

The tragedy has stirred up much discussion about the role of the American industry of Islamophobia. Who is responsible when violent acts are committed in sick attempts to confront the "threat of Islam"?



Is it only the one who holds the gun? Or are those who inspired the shooter also culpable?

Certainly no one would deny that most of the blame lies with Breivik. But it should embarrass us that American haters are informing European murder sprees. As the great civil rights leader Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "Words do not fade. What starts out as a sound, ends in a deed."

We may not be able to draw a direct line from mean-spirited bloggers to a small island across the sea, marked by death. However, we can't ignore the thousands of hateful words that inspired 74 repugnant deeds. And if we allow the industry of Islamophobia and others like it to flourish, we can't be surprised if words once again manifest in reality. ■

*Eboo Patel is founder of the Interfaith Youth Core and author of Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation.*



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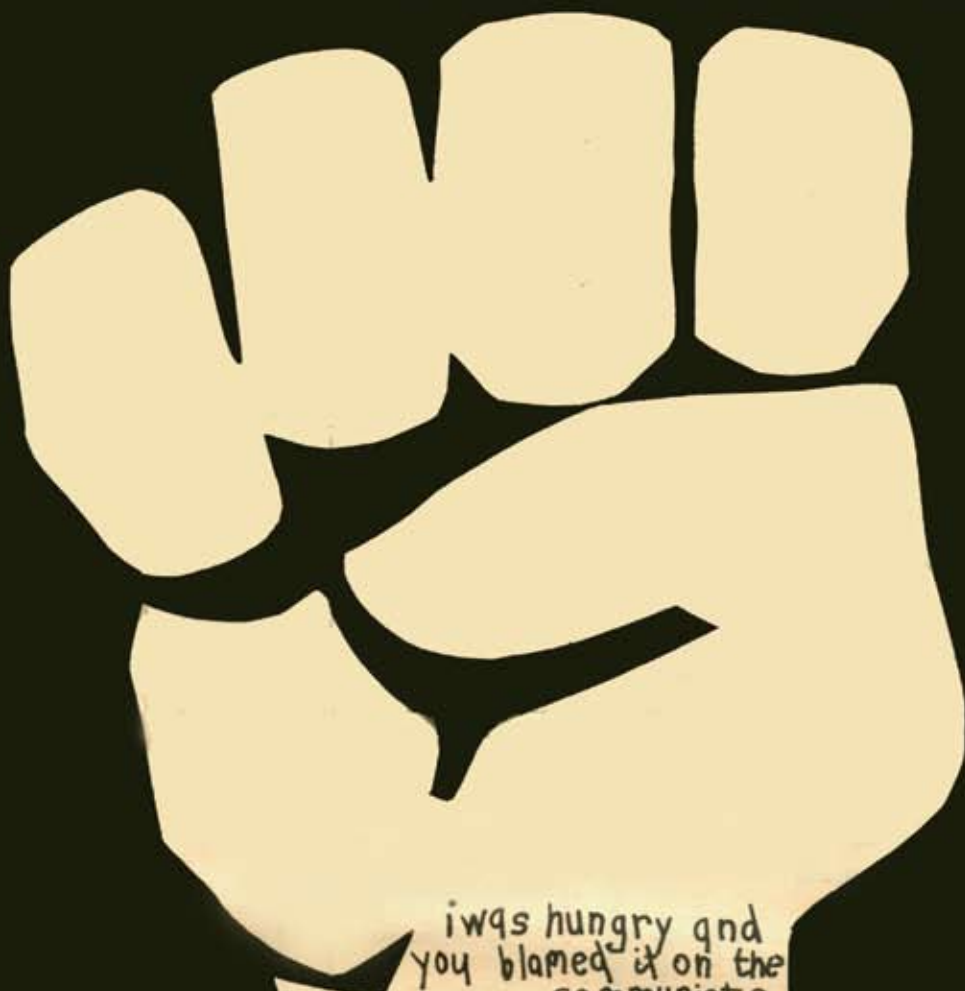


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i was hungry and  
you blamed it on the  
communists  
i was hungry and you  
circled the moon  
i was hungry and you  
told me to wait  
i was hungry and you  
set up a commission  
i was hungry and you said,  
"so were my ancestors"  
i was hungry and you said,  
we don't hire over 35  
i was hungry and you said,  
god helps those...  
i was hungry and you told me  
i shouldn't be  
i was hungry and you told me  
machines do that work now  
i was hungry and you  
had napalm bills  
to pay  
i was hungry and you said,  
the poor are always with us.  
lord,  
when did we see you hungry?



# FROM A SHOEBOX TO A MOVEMENT

**For 40 years, Sojourners has been fighting the good fight.**  
**Where do we go from here?** *by* JIM WALLIS

**THE METAPHOR** I have often used to describe the origins of Sojourners in the fall of 1971 is that we raised a flag up a flagpole. The words on the flag proclaimed, “Biblical faith requires justice.” Many on the ground felt the same way, but they often couldn’t see each other and felt alone. When they saw the flag we raised, they ran to the bottom of the pole where they met others—and a movement was born.

Our core group met at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the northern suburbs of Chicago. We connected the first week of seminary and became excited about a new possibility for American Christianity. We ranged across a wide spectrum: civil rights and anti-war activists who had come to Christ; InterVarsity and Campus Crusade students and staff searching for a gospel that could reach the current generation of students; hippies and druggies converted to Jesus; disaffected Southern Baptists from Baylor University; Moody Bible Institute graduates against the war in Vietnam; and even one from Bob Jones University in the heart of American fundamentalism. We were at a leading evangelical seminary, not a liberal one; some of us chose deliberately to go there to argue with our own evangelical tradition about what the Bible really says.

For example, one of our first activities was finding every verse of scripture about the poor, wealth



and poverty, and social justice. We found more than 2,000 texts that we then cut out of an old Bible. We were left with a “Bible full of holes,” which I used to take out with me to preach.

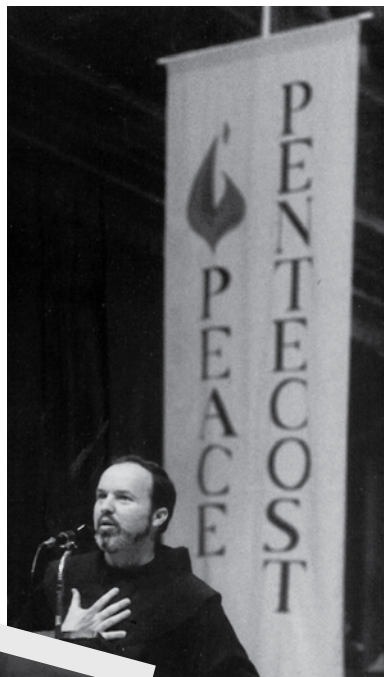
At one point, the seminary tried to expel some of us, claiming we had cost the school \$1 million in lost contributions because of all our preaching, teaching, organizing, and demonstrating. The plan to expel us was foiled when more than half the student body and faculty stood up for us. At Trinity we began to meet key Christian leaders such as John Stott and

John Howard Yoder, who were very encouraging of our “radical discipleship” and biblical vision of justice and peace.

After the publication of the first issue of the magazine, then called *The Post-American*, a U.S. senator got in touch with us and invited us to Washington, D.C. He was Sen. Mark Hatfield, a Republican from Oregon, whose opposition to the Vietnam War as an evangelical got him letters beginning, “Dear Former Brother in Christ.” He needed some friends, and we were introduced to the nation’s politics. From the start, political party and ideology mattered little to us, but we soon learned that “prophetic politics,” not partisan politics, was what was most needed by the nation, and we have always looked for allies wherever we could find them.

At the beginning, we were all white men, as

At left, a page from the first issue of *The Post-American* (Fall 1971), the precursor to *Sojourners* magazine.



Sojourners' Washington, D.C., location has provided many opportunities for public witness, worship, and civil disobedience. From far left, an act of conscience outside the U.S. Capitol; Richard Rohr, OFM, speaks at Sojourners' Peace Pentecost event at the Washington National Cathedral; a peace vigil at the Pentagon. Below left, worship has always been at the heart of Sojourners' public witness.



most seminarians were in those days. When some women finally came to Trinity the next year, they joined our group, as did some of the few black students at Trinity College across the road. From the beginning, evangelical feminism and the scandal of white racism were major themes in the magazine. The rich diversity of the body of Christ has

me when I was a 15 year old, trying to work out my faith in the world. I was feeling a growing concern about the racial division and discrimination that was tearing apart my hometown of Detroit. A church elder took me aside and said to me, "Jim, Christianity has nothing to do with racism. That's political and our faith is personal." That's the night that I left my faith, in my head and heart; I was gone altogether soon after that, joining the student movements of

## Christians committed to social justice are dangerous, because they challenge wealth, power, and violence.

been a defining characteristic of our message and mission, and we continue to grow more deeply into it.

WE HAVE FOUGHT two major battles over these last 40 years, with a third fight now before us.

### 1. The first great battle we fought was against the idea that faith was just a private thing.

That was the way many of us had been raised—to be only concerned about "me and the Lord," remaining almost oblivious to the world around us, except in our continual efforts not to be "worldly."

That narrow, individualistic view of religion came to a crisis point for

my generation. I later came back to faith in the radical Jesus of Matthew 25, who called us to serve "the least of these," and with my new seminary companions fought for the *public* meaning of faith. God is personal, we agreed, but never private.

That was our first fight at Sojourners. When faith is merely private, wealth, power, and violence remain unchallenged, because religion isn't understood to be about such things. In fact, privatized faith is an asset to injustice, keeping the faithful complacent, complicit, or just quiet about it. It took a movement, but we won that battle. Now, almost nobody—not even the most conservative Christians—would say that faith is merely a private affair with no implications for public life. Relating faith to public life and to society is now assumed to be both important and necessary, and the debate is only about *how* faith should publically express itself.

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**2.** The second great battle was against the claims of the then-new “Religious Right” that the only social issues about which Christians should be concerned were about sexuality, one way or another. According to the media, abortion, homosexuality, and pornography were the political issues that evangelicals most cared about and would be voting on. We argued that Christians should be concerned about more than just two or three so-called “moral issues” and, in particular, that God’s call to care for and defend the poor was absolutely central to biblical faith. We were “pro-life” and deeply committed to “family values,” but we said the God of the Bible was one of both compassion and justice.

To restrict faith to only a few issues of mostly personal morality leaves wealth, power, and violence unchallenged. Religion becomes a political

**3.** The third great battle will be about the nature of the society that God wants and, in particular, whether there is such a thing as *the common good*. It will be about the role of government, the role of churches, the role of the market, and the role of the believer and citizen. Some say that caring for the poor is well and good, but that government should have nothing to do with it, that private charity is the only answer to poverty. Capitalism should be left unregulated and unhindered to solve our problems with the “invisible hand of the market,” they say, and we should just trust that wealth will trickle down.

But others point to the rich tradition of the common good, in which we are all held accountable for how our behavior affects others. That ethos is deeply rooted in Catholic social teaching, in the evangelical revivals and in black and Latino churches, in the Protestant social gospel and in Judaism and

**The test of any society is how it treats the poor, the vulnerable, and the stranger.**

support for injustice and for those who defend the status quo. After I was a guest on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* for the first time, many young people emailed me to say, “I didn’t know that you could be a Christian and care about poverty, the environment, or the war in Iraq.” The success of my book *God’s Politics* revealed hundreds of thousands of people who didn’t feel represented by a narrow Religious Right, nor a secular Left, and were seeking a biblical, theological, and spiritual foundation for social justice.

I think we have won that battle too. Even conservative think tanks now speak of a Christian concern for the poor, and they even try to invoke (and redefine) the term “social justice.” God’s love for the most vulnerable—the children of the inner city, the hungry and the homeless, the global poor who are the victims of famines and pandemics, or the women and children caught up in the modern slavery of human trafficking—is being preached from many evangelical pulpits today. Caring for the poor is now seen as a sign of the kingdom of God, especially among a younger generation of believers.

Islam, and in the American Constitution, which insists that government shall provide for the “general welfare.”

Recently, former TV talk show host Glenn Beck was so mad at *Sojourners*, and me, that he put me up on his famous blackboard because we were “social justice Christians” who, he said, were very dangerous. He was right. Christians committed to social justice are indeed dangerous, because they challenge wealth, power, and violence, whereas private charity alone does not. To say that the God of the Bible is a God of justice, not merely a God of charity, will get you into trouble every time.

We have recently seen the emergence of the tea party, which confuses individualism with freedom, a resurgent libertarian political focus on “me” instead of “us,” and the renewal in popularity of philosophies such as Ayn Rand’s gospel of selfishness. In addition, we’ve seen the failure of American political liberalism to stand up to corporate America or to the bureaucracies of its own institutions. Given the lack of alternatives, the result is a nation suffering from a loss of political imagination and a lack of moral courage.







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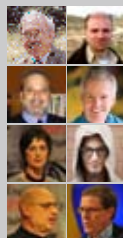


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# Salt, Light, and Social Change

**An evangelical scholar looks at Sojourners' role in evangelical social justice.** *by* SOONG-CHAN RAH

We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers—we are called to love our neighbors, and even our enemies. The test of any society is how it treats the poor, the vulnerable, and the stranger. That's what the Bible says, and that's what Jesus calls us to. The next battle for Sojourners is to preach that vision and to practice that ethic, to seek the common good in an age of selfishness. We will try to articulate the commonwealth of God, which will surely challenge the ideologies and idolatries of both the Right and the Left.

As we look ahead, I am greatly encouraged by the emergence of a new generation of Christians, a new cadre of leaders for such a mission. I trust both the personal faith and the social conscience of the young people I meet and work with every day. This is the demographic that will be the future of the ministry of Sojourners. They are men and women; white, black, Latino, Asian American, and Native people. They define themselves less by tribe and more by relationships and networks. They are people of deep faith, and at the same time respectful of interfaith identities. They are activist and contemplative, people who connect their spirituality with social change. They greatly value their diversity of race, ethnicity, and culture; are not encumbered by parochial or national identities; and have a global worldview. They want to be in, but not of, the worlds in which they live. They are pilgrims who seek countercultural community, and they also seek the welfare of the city they are in. They are Sojourners.

Forty years ago, we published the magazine out of a communal house near the seminary, and we kept the names and addresses of our subscribers on 3x5 index cards in a shoe box. Now we are a digital publishing effort on many platforms, reaching a quarter of a million people each week and, through the broader media, millions more. We have grown from a community to a network and a movement—online and face to face. We hope to become a fully engaged and interactive social media network and international community of perhaps “a million Christians for social justice,” the extended Sojourners community. Imagine that! Then help us create it. It's been 40 wonderful years; now it's on to the next 40. ■

**Jim Wallis** is editor-in-chief of Sojourners.

**THE YEAR OF** my evangelical discontent dawned at the age of 22. In 1990, having recently completed my undergraduate education, I languished in a secure job while faithfully serving my church on weekends. Deeply rooted in evangelical Christianity, I could not imagine ever turning in my metaphorical membership card. But I struggled with what I perceived to be shallowness in evangelicalism.

My church focused on personal spiritual growth. Faith had been reduced to an individualistic expression; my ticket to heaven punched with required purchases of the Scofield Bible and *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. My years as an undergraduate in New York reintroduced me to a world that I had abandoned when my family moved out of inner-city Baltimore. I had trouble reconciling the jarring juxtaposition of my secular education on the border of Harlem with my comfortable suburban church. My new Mazda 626 failed to provide me with the expected satisfaction of having arrived into middle-class America at such a young age.

In the midst of my evangelical angst, I stumbled across *Sojourners* magazine. The content of the magazine proved revelatory. No longer could I reduce my faith to multiple trips to the altar and a feel-good individualized faith. Suddenly, my new car represented oppression rather than triumph.

My personal anguish around faith reflected a century of confusion and division within evangelical history. My immigrant family emerged from poverty and marginalization. With my graduation from an Ivy



**An anti-capital-punishment vigil outside the White House in 1985. Sojourners has worked to broaden the traditionally narrow set of issues embraced by evangelicals.**

League school, I had achieved middle-American success. I conjectured that I could proceed to law school, make big bucks, and relish my role as a faithful church tithe-payer—but what difference would my faith have made? *Sojourners* challenged my American evangelical assumptions and redirected the trajectory of my life. Over the past 40 years, the magazine and the organization behind it have shaped many stories similar to my own.

*Sojourners'* journey over the past four decades reflects larger issues in evangelicalism



# Real



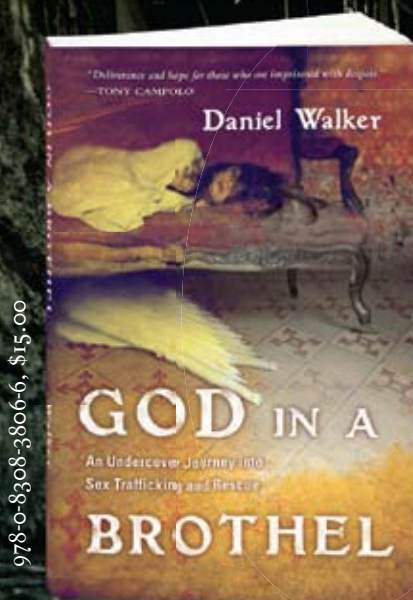
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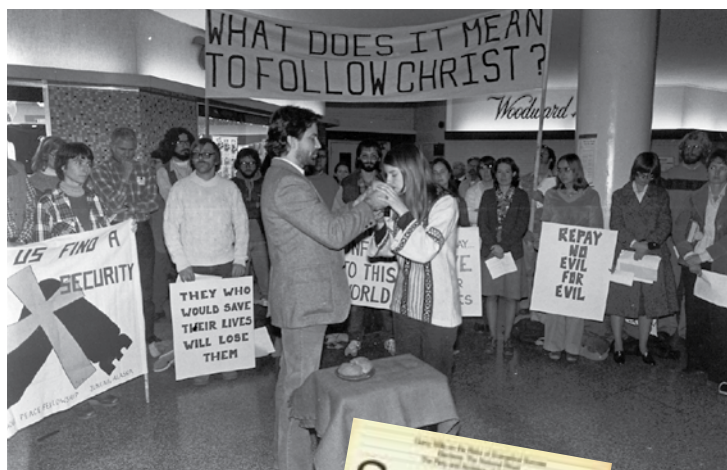
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Sojourners community often carried its worship to public sites. At left, communion is shared during a vigil for peace inside the Pentagon.

in the last half of the 20th century. Timothy Smith, in *Revivalism and Social Reform*, argues that 19th century evangelicals “played a key role in the widespread attack upon slavery, poverty, and greed.” Revivalism and social justice should be joined in holy matrimony. Nineteenth century evangelicalism embodied this union. Twentieth century evangelicalism witnessed a painful divorce. Early 20th century fundamentalism prioritized individual spirituality over social transformation. Progressive evangelicals recognized that the evangelical church, in ignoring social concerns, failed to live up to the standards of authentic biblical faith. *Sojourners* saw this development as the American captivity of the church and called for a “post-American” theology.

The 1970s witnessed the rise of progressive evangelicalism. The 1973 “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” emerged as a national expression of this perspective. The burgeoning evangelical progressive movement manifested on Christian college campuses, in InterVarsity chapters, within new publications, and in the formation of Evangelicals for McGovern.

*The Post-American*, precursor to *Sojourners*, found itself in the middle of this rising stream of progressive evangelicalism. The publication, which emerged from an intentional living community in the Chicago area, slowly grew in readership. In 1975, members of the group moved to Washington, D.C., formed a new community, and renamed the magazine *Sojourners*. The move was precipitated in part by a desire to engage in an incarnational presence among the urban poor.

The new Sojourners community pursued a model of intentional living. An internal history document summarized, “The community

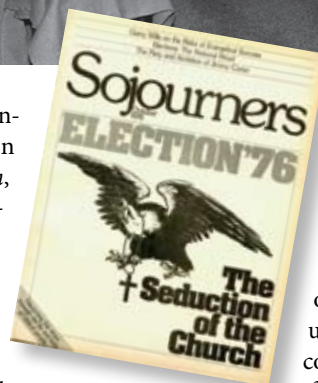
lived together in common households, had a common purse, formed a worshipping community, got involved in neighborhood issues, organized national events on behalf of peace and justice, and continued to publish the magazine.” The community centered on a cluster of households that functioned as “an extended family unit ... The

household [became] a place where poor and homeless people can be incorporated into [community] life,” according to a 1977 article in the magazine. A regular column called the “Euclid Street Journal” appeared in the pages of *Sojourners* and provided snapshots of the community.

By presenting stories of community life, *Sojourners* helped to spark the organization of other intentional communities. Letters poured in from people seeking to join the Sojourners community, start other intentional communities, and connect with already existing communities. *Sojourners* emerged as an exemplar community for many progressive evangelicals. Not only did the magazine advocate for the poor, but the Sojourners community embodied real-life ministry with the poor.

FROM THE LATE 1970s forward, much of the public focus on evangelical political involvement centered on the Religious Right. The media gave evangelicals much of the credit for the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. In the 1980s and 1990s, groups such as the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, and the Eagle Forum increased their influence and grip over both evangelical Christianity and the Republican Party. The 2000 and 2004 elections of George W. Bush cemented this relationship.

Even as the Religious Right gained momentum, *Sojourners* continued to publish







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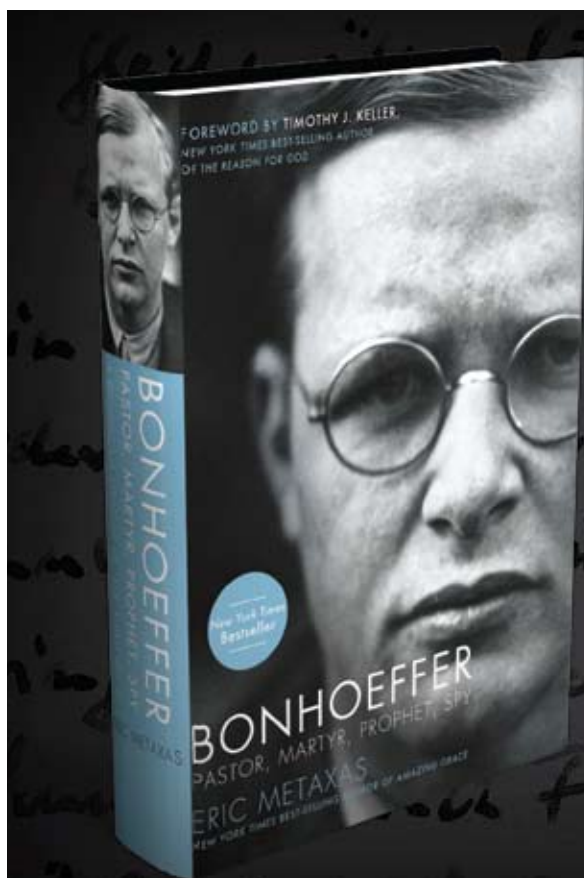
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social justice challenges for the Christian community. As the media increasingly identified evangelicals with political conservatism, progressive evangelicals remained largely out of the spotlight. *Sojourners*, meanwhile, took on a more ecumenical flavor, and asserted its own role beyond evangelicalism. The November 1977 issue had declared: "There will continue to be those who write for and read *Sojourners* who are deeply Christian but may well be non-evangelical."

As early as 1976, *Sojourners* warned of "a major initiative by the evangelical Far Right in this country." *Sojourners* asserted a claim that served as a common refrain in the upcoming years: "Evangelical Christians are not all right wing; in fact, most are not. Changing this perception may be one of our most important political tasks in the raging culture war."

In 1995 *Sojourners* launched the Call to Renewal movement "to specifically focus on poverty by uniting churches and faith-based organizations across the theological and political spectrum

## The Religious Right had hijacked American evangelicalism.

to lift up those whom Jesus called 'the least of these.'" *Sojourners* recognized that the Religious Right had hijacked American evangelicalism. Opposition to the Religious Right drew national attention to the larger work of *Sojourners* as it advocated for progressive Christianity on a political level.

*God's Politics*, written by *Sojourners* editor-in-chief Jim Wallis and published in 2005, arrived at the right moment in American evangelical political history. The Religious Right had dominated the conversation regarding the evangelical role in American politics. *God's Politics* declared the end of the monologue of the Religious Right. Wallis argued that neither the Religious Right nor the secular Left understood the role of values in politics. A new season for *Sojourners* witnessed a more explicit engagement in national politics. The October 2004 issue declared that "God is not a Republican. Or a Democrat ... Extreme fundamentalists are losing credibility among the faithful by putting loyalty to party before loyalty to scripture."

*God's Politics* increased *Sojourners*' visibility in secular media and politics, and it also helped reach the population that *Sojourners* had started with: evangelicals. As Wallis made the circuit of both the secular halls of power and Christian institutions, his reputation, and that of *Sojourners*, grew among evangelicals, particularly younger evangelicals, as a whole new generation discovered the magazine. The *God's Politics* blog attracted younger writers and a younger readership. *Sojourners* had strummed the same chords over the past four decades. For a variety of reasons, the chords struck true at that particular moment.

For a generation and through many changes, *Sojourners* has continued to oppose an American captivity of evangelicalism, assert a progressive evangelical concern for the poor, and raise the flag for biblical social justice, all while retaining a strong sense of evangelical revivalism, in many ways providing the heart and soul of the progressive evangelical movement. ■

**Soong-Chan Rah**, Milton B. Engebretson Associate Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago and a *Sojourners* board member, is author of *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*.





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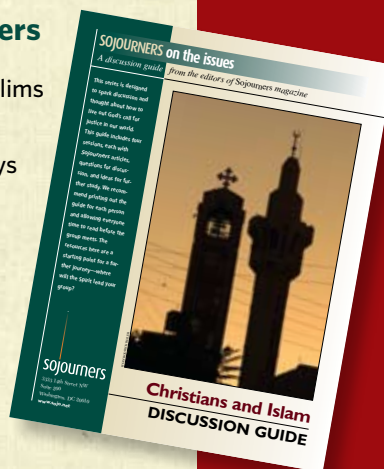


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# Standing Up for the Earth

**Largest U.S. climate action says no to pipeline.**

## **POLICE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.,**

arrested 1,252 Americans as part of a 15-day event at the White House protesting the controversial 1,700-mile Keystone XL tar sands oil pipeline. The two-week demonstration, initiated by environmentalist Bill McKibben, was the largest on global warming in U.S. history.

There are numerous reasons to object to this pipeline: Privately held TransCanada, the pipeline owner, is responsible for 12 oil spills in the U.S. in 2011; tar sands strip mining in Alberta, Canada, already involves clear-cutting boreal forests, breaking indigenous treaties, irreversibly damaging water quality, and introducing toxic waste into the food chain affecting human health. Pipeline jobs are few, temporary, poorly paid, and often given to migrant workers; the pipeline extension threatens the Ogallala Aquifer, America's largest freshwater reserve; and it takes 8,800 pounds of earth and tar sands, plus an average of 155 gallons of fresh water, to produce one barrel of tar sands oil, which will fill half a tank of a Chevy Suburban.

But there is one reason that makes this pipeline different. "Exploitation of tar sands would make it implausible to stabilize the climate and avoid disastrous global climate impacts," says NASA's leading climate scientist James Hansen, who was arrested with religious leaders as part of the protest. "If the tar sands are thrown into the mix, it is essentially game over." The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency points out that Canadian tar sands carbon emissions are "82 percent greater than the average crude refined in the U.S., on a well-to-tank basis." This pipeline is a climate killer.

Providing a presidential permit for the pipeline has become the most important environmental decision facing President Obama before the 2012 election. Sparking nationwide opposition, more than 60 religious leaders, ranchers from the Midwest, former Obama campaigners, leading climate scientists, and young voters whose first election was in 2008 are telling Obama not to issue the permit. The hundreds of demonstrators outside the White House were backed by hundreds of thousands more around the world who oppose further tar sands development. According to organizers, more than 651,530 people signed online petitions directed at Obama, urging him to refuse to permit the XL pipeline and instead invest in developing safe, clean energy.

—Rose Marie Berger

*Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners associate editor, was an organizer for the Tar Sands religious witness. Learn more about the pipeline at [www.tarsandsaction.org](http://www.tarsandsaction.org).*



Heather Wilson



Photos by Josh Lopez





More than 1,200 people were arrested for peacefully urging President Obama to stop the "climate killer" tar sands pipeline.



From left, Joelle Novey from Tikkun Leil Shabbat in Washington, D.C.; Sojourners associate editor Rose Marie Berger; and Franciscan Catholic priest Jacek Orzechowsky from Silver Spring, Maryland.

**"The oil pipeline is such an extreme act of environmental injustice that, as a Christian, I cannot remain silent."**

**—Elizabeth Getfeld**



# Harry and the Principalities

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**The 10-year pop culture love affair with  
Harry Potter leaves questions at the crux.**

*by* BILL WYLIE-KELLERMANN

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**FOR A DECADE** now, we have read as a family J.K. Rowling's magical Harry Potter books aloud to one another in beds and cars and cottages. A bookstore friend mailed us the first, which caught and held with our two girls. Except for the last, which she never saw or heard, the subsequent volumes served for us as a therapeutic backstory to my wife's struggle with cancer. Here was a lively gift of diversion and delight that we increasingly read as rich in themes both biblical and Christian. It was as if the Oxford Inklings (C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, and Charles Williams, among others) had hoisted a pint and admitted a new voice to the table.

That itself was an irony beside the early uproar in certain evangelical communities against what was taken to be the books' witchcraft-laden, dark, and cultic assaults on the faith. Night-fears that the kids in backyard play would lay down their guns and take up wands.

Last summer's release of the final film, *Harry Potter and the Deathly*





*Hallows: Part 2*, and the expected Christmas release of the DVD boxed set, brings down the curtain on this 10-year pop culture love affair with Harry and Hogwarts. Now it seems the burgeoning industry of theological commentary upon it will only grow.

In times such as these, with crises rife and death on the planetary prowl, one pauses deep before spending comment on popular culture. Unless they are all connected.

By my lights, in the final film, J.K. Rowling gave away the gospel store. I say this presuming Rowling had the ability to hold its center through the twisted turns of assorted screenwriters and directors, not to mention commercial powers. (Who knows? I may be wrong there.) But here's what I mean. In the final volume, of both book and film, after a long wilderness testing (with a portable tent and a light, no less), the more messianic themes come to a head.

As an infant Harry survived Voldemort's herodian attack to become "the chosen one." On Christmas Eve, Harry and Hermione visit the site of that attack and his parents' graves, which are marked with a passage (unidentified) from 1 Corinthians 15:26 (KJV): "The last enemy to be destroyed shall be death."

When the climax of series and story nears (spoiler alert), when Harry moves inexorably to his face-off with Voldemort, he meets the Dark

The myth of redemptive violence is built into the narrative structure of popular culture.

Voldemort, background, Warner Bros.



Voldemort confronts our hero in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the second film from the final book of the series.

Warner Bros.

**'Live like Harry!'  
I say. Stand  
the ground.**

Lord with a gracious freedom to die. And die he does, for the sake of his friends, for the sake of the struggle, because he is called to.

And yet. Passing through a conversation with his mentor in the shadowless white light of King's Cross railway station, Harry rises to another encounter.

Here's the main point. In the books, Harry never kills anyone. He scatters dementors with his patronus charm; he stuns opponents; he walks into danger with deceptive incognitos. Once he wounds his student nemesis, and once in anger he causes torturous pain. But Harry never kills. In fact, he is so quick to use the disarming jinx "Expelliarmus" that it becomes his signature spell.

In the final moment, on which everything turns, Voldemort shrieks the death curse "Avada Kedavra," and Harry "yells to high heaven" his disarming charm, which brings the Dark Lord's wand tumbling through the air toward Harry.

Or so it goes in the book.

In *Deathly Hallows: Part 2*, the film, it appears that Voldemort does *not* die by his own rebounding curse. The film's final battle scene is greatly extended. Voldemort's immortal power is lost when his last revivification talisman—the snake Nagini—is destroyed. Harry sees his adversary fall, vulnerable, and readies his next spell. Silently, Voldemort casts one more curse at Harry—the deadly green sparks flow—and *without a word*, Harry counters. The two spells collide, but this time Harry forces the Dark Lord's curse back until the death-telling green seeps through the wand and engulfs

Voldemort. He shatters apart.

The sparks may differ, red and green; the wand may fly through the air, but deep difference has been silenced: Neither wizard utters aloud curse nor spell. We have no "Avada Kedavra" vs. "Expelliarmus." It is not the curse of death vs. the nonviolent disarming of the opponent (in the book with a humanizing invite to remorse, repentance, and transformation). It is just plain Might and Right become one. Voldemort dies at the hand of a stronger wizard with a more powerful claim on the wand. Which is to say, finally Harry kills. The real victory of death.

I DO UNDERSTAND what it takes to turn a gorgeously written 700-page novel into a screenplay, even two. I am not among those who lament long over treasured characters or dialogue lost to a tighter narrative path. Granted, I didn't understand why the final movie scene wasn't in the Great Hall with the truth-unveiling conversation, but let the expository details go. Nor may I like it in the least, but I even understand why they are building theme-park rides into the plot and multiplying the pyrotechnics for the 3-D crowd.

But when it comes to the genuine crux, as it were, the heart, the center, I counted on Rowling to fight for the life of this thing. "Live like Harry!" I say. Stand the ground.

At the turn of the millennium, Walter Wink wrote about the myth of redemptive violence. "In short," wrote Wink, "the Myth of Redemptive Violence is the story of the victory of order over chaos by means of violence. It is the ideology of conquest,



the original religion of the status quo. The gods favor those who conquer. Conversely, whoever conquers must have the favor of the gods. The common people exist to perpetuate the advantage that the gods have conferred upon the king, the aristocracy, and the priesthood."

This is the myth built into the narrative structure of popular imperial culture, the repetitive story that "might makes right," that violence creates and redeems and justifies. It is the order of the day among the crises that prowl our planet. It is the main Hollywood script. The military press release. The corporate commercial. The story we are all impressed into serving and buying and living. It is the plotting that bought or bullied its way into the final installment of the Harry Potter films. It is also the gospel story hijacked and inverted.

This is a constant of the domination system, including its Hollywood minions. I remember my similar dismay more than a decade ago when *The Matrix* brilliantly transposed the Jesus story, politics and all, only to have it turned on its head (with death and resurrection still to come), pivoting on one decisive line from Neo: "Guns. Lots of guns." And the killing began.

*IN DEATHLY HALLOWS: Part 2*, can so small an omission in the Harry vs. Voldemort face-off bear such pivotal weight?

In some ways that's the very point. In a subsequent closing cinematic scene, Harry considers his rightful claim on that Elder Wand—the most powerful wand in his world. It is like one of the three great temptations of Christ—and Harry resists. He breaks it and throws its parts into the abyss. Good that. But one can't help thinking the wand is destroyed, but the myth of redemptive violence survives. Even prevails, aided and abetted.

It is this myth's survival that undergirds forward bases and targeted drones, the endless trillion-dollar wars, oil spills and "fracking," budget stand-offs, mass incarcerations, and more. Popular culture will not merely divert, but back it all up.

Perhaps I'm unfair to Rowling. Perhaps her authorial role to stand against the powers and hold the story's heart was long since spent. But if she has any remorse, I hope she will declare it. We need a different ending than the one now playing out in the theaters of history. We need the one in *The Book*.

**Bill Wylie-Kellermann** is a United Methodist pastor who serves St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Detroit, Michigan.

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# How to Read the Bible

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by WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

## NEW FAVORITES

*Here are five relatively recent titles that seem to me both of great importance and compelling interest:*

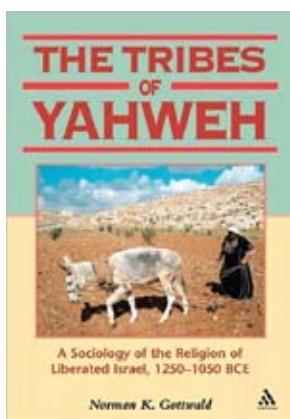
With **Job**, part of the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Smyth & Helwys, 2006), Samuel E. Balentine has written a truth-telling commentary on the book of Job that teems with broad cultural awareness and stunning, courageous insight. Job lives at the edge of scripture and goads at the edge of faith. Balentine is knowing and unflinching in his capacity to face the rich truth of God's holiness and all in our world that is not morally reliable or predictable.

In **The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder** (Oxford University Press, 2010), William P. Brown has offered what will surely and quickly become a classic on the difficult issue of "science and religion" or, more precisely "creation and evolution." He has taken serious trouble to engage with the best available scientific thought and shows how biblical claims for God as creator resonate deeply with the order and awe-producing wonder of creation that inescapably culminates in doxology. He pays only slight attention to the shrill "new atheists," but takes seriously the "adults" in the scientific community who know better than any thin scientism.

Getty Images

Neil Elliott, author of **The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow**





of Empire (Fortress Press, 2008), is at the forefront of the new generation of scholars who are learning to reread Paul (and especially Romans) in a contemporary way that moves beyond what became the reductionist categories of the old law-grace model. The new awareness is that Paul is making a vigorous claim for the rule of Christ in the presence of and over against the rule of Rome, and over against the Jewish leadership that colluded with Rome in its imperial ambitions. Elliott shows that the affirmations Paul makes about the rule of Christ and the strictures against the alternatives are aimed exactly at the rule of Herod. Specifically this applies to the much noted verses in chapter

**Gottwald's work was a wake-up call from "dogmatic slumbers" that had faded the Bible into an easy religious testimony.**

1 concerning sexual distortion. The book is an important read for those who live in current "empire" in our society.

In **The Ten Commandments** (*Interpretation* commentary series; Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), Patrick D. Miller, in his usual precise and methodical way, has written the new classic exposition on the Ten Commandments. Miller has full mastery of complex critical issues but presses readily beyond critical questions to the theological substance of the stipulations of the covenant. He underscores the way in which the commands of Sinai break beyond the old stereotypes of "law" in Christian tradition and provide an ethical map for the performance of faith that intends serious covenantal emancipation. The book is an urgent read in a culture that has lost its way concerning neighborly loyalties and responsibilities.

In **Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism** (Eerdmans, 2011) Anthea E. Portier-Young has written most helpfully and compellingly about the apocalyptic literature. She probes the complex historical-critical issues and shows how this literature is in fact a courageous entertainment of the hardest questions

of faith, order, and freedom. The term "resistance" in her subtitle suggests the practical import of the literature and of her book. The book is timely in a society that now faces an "ending" of a world we have known and trusted. This literature, as she makes clear, is an interpretive enterprise that deals with the "end of the world" and the emergence of a newness that is uncertain and threatening.

### OLD RELIABLES

*Here are five books that have been decisive for my own work in Old Testament studies:*

B. Davie Napier published a little-known and little-appreciated book while at Yale Divinity School, **From Faith to Faith: Essays on Old Testament Literature** (Harper & Brothers, 1955). It was my introduction to the thought of Gerhard von Rad, whom Napier followed and whose work was only then being translated into English.

I read this study while I was in seminary; Napier discussed the "universal condition" in Genesis 1 to 11 and the Succession Narrative in 2 Samuel. I found his exposition to be electrifying, and from it I got "hooked" on the Old Testament. After that the work of von Rad occupied the center of my imagination, even as Napier continued his own poetic path of exposition.

In **Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture** (Fortress Press, 1979), Brevard S. Childs, with his great erudition, changed the field of Old Testament study and my work with it. In his book-by-book introduction, he traced a move from a critical reading to what he called the "canonical" reading, with his sustained insistence that the biblical literature is to be taken as scripture, that is, as theological affirmation that cannot be explained away by modern critical categories. Along with the somewhat less nuanced work of Walter Wink, Childs freshly legitimated theological reading of the text when modern critical work seemed to be the only proper game in town. It turned out that his notion of "canon" was somewhat unstable, as he continued to change his mind; in my purview this is his great breakthrough, a going back from which is impossible.



Norman K. Gottwald's **The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.** (Orbis Books, 1979), published in the same year as Childs' *Introduction*, offered what became the benchmark reading of the Old Testament in terms of socio-economic-political reality. His work was the harbinger of social scientific work to come, including liberationist, feminist, and post-colonial readings that now are front and center in the field. Gottwald makes clear that the Old Testament is shaped by and evokes attention to the economic realities that are the base beneath the superstructure of faith and which cannot be neglected in our exposition. His work was a wake-up call from "dogmatic slumbers" that had faded the Bible into an easy religious testimony. It is impossible, in my judgment, to overstate his influence for good in our common study.

With **The Prophets** (Harper & Row, 1962), Abraham J. Heschel wrote the definitive book on the prophets of Israel and did so with great lyrical force. He did not linger over critical matters but went directly to the theological substance of the literature. It is Heschel who discerned so poignantly the pathos of God, the divine capacity for suffering that has become the ground for subsequent theologies of hope, for "suffering produces hope." There is some irony in the fact that it required this Jewish writer to show Christians how suffering (of God) is a ground for newness.

Jon D. Levenson, author of **The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism** (Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), has almost single-handedly summoned Christian exegetes such as me to unlearn and relearn our work. He has made clear the extent to which much of our expository work has been unwittingly supersessionist in irresponsible ways. His essay in this book titled "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology" is a major reference point offering new possibilities both for shared reading of the text between Christians and Jews and for vigilant awareness that we read differently in ways that matter. I expect, from Levenson, to keep unlearning and relearning. ■

*Walter Brueggemann, a Sojourners contributing editor, is professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.*

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# BRIDGING the Bible Gap

**Seminaries train pastors on how to read the Bible. But those tools often don't reach people in the pews.**

by JEWEL GINGERICH LONGENECKER

**CHRISTIANS HAVE LONG** claimed the Bible as a central source of authority for faith and life. Yet church members are often at a loss as to how to interpret the scriptures. While academic biblical scholarship has flourished since the 17th century, there is a troubling disconnect between seminaries and congregations, between what hermeneutics specialist Hans de Wit calls “professional readers” and “ordinary readers” of scripture.

So, for example, master of divinity students at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, where I work, gain skills in literary criticism, socio-historical analysis, Hebrew and Greek language, source criticism, and canonical criticism, among others, with the expectation that they will become leaders who are “grounded in and continuously formed by the Bible,” according to the program’s stated goals. But at the same time, today’s North American Mennonite church members often exhibit a widespread lack of familiarity with biblical interpretive tools and in many cases a lack of regular engagement with the Bible.

AMBS professor Alan Kreider wrote, “The estrangement of many North American Mennonite Christians from the Bible, their sense that they know the book, that it’s overfamiliar or irrelevant, and their captivity to American ills of individualism, consumerism, and over-busyness—all of these make it hard to indwell the ancient text and make it life-giving today.”

The chasm between academic biblical scholarship and the use of the Bible in the church is found across denominations. Christine Eaton Blair, a pastor, Christian educator, and practical theologian, sums up the issue:

*For most of this century, the majority of ministers and Christian educators have received training in the use of historical-critical tools. For the most part, however, the laity in our congregations have not been taught even the simplest of these tools. ... This lack of lay training has undermined the foundational tenet of the Protestant Reformation, which insists on the right and duty of every Christian to read and interpret the Bible.*

Blair notes that pastors often lack guidance in how to translate the technical tools they learned in seminary into something usable to the laity and typically shy away from teaching them at all. “In my experience, teachers worry that using historical-critical tools will, at best, bore their adult students, and at worst, shake their faith,” she writes.

Getty Images









How is it helpful to expose people in the pew to literary construction, ancient geography, nuances of source languages, the relative reliability of manuscripts, or the editorial processes involved in putting the Bible together? Some may argue that only a few churchgoers are interested in such seeming minutiae—that these matters are best left in the hands of experts so that pastors are free to carry out the “real work” of attending to people’s spiritual needs.

Experience, however, tells a different story. Without access to scholarly tools, many Christians are prone to misuse the Bible or to give up reading it entirely. In the

Conservative-leaning Christians sometimes resist the idea that one needs advanced education or sophisticated analytical techniques to understand scripture. They observe that academic study of the Bible can lead to objectifying it and to a failure to grasp and communicate its simple message and spiritual power for everyday life. They remind us that Jesus’ followers were poor and uneducated, and that the religious leaders of the day were often targets of Jesus’ anger and rebuke.

Of course, Bible study should not be reserved for the highly educated. Bible scholars and church leaders across the theological spectrum have come to believe that extraor-

used in deference to the Jewish practice of refraining from speaking God’s name. This knowledge, gleaned through scholarly tools, helps support a theology that values participating in God’s reign in this life as well as in the life to come. In contrast, many churchgoers assume that “kingdom of heaven” refers strictly to the afterlife and are surprised to discover its many earthly dimensions.

A friend who participated in a 12-week living history simulation of the book of Romans (as outlined in a book by New Testament scholar Reta Halteman Finger) gained a new appreciation for the people of the Roman house churches, for their conversations and debates, and perhaps most surprising of all, for Paul’s writing in Romans and beyond. This experience with scholarly tools of interpretation made accessible to lay people in a truly engaging way gave my friend renewed energy for Bible study.

I remember my own tears of joy and relief when, as a seminary student, I began to read biblical texts with the help of scholarly tools. A study of the phrase “eternal life” in all of its appearances in the gospel of John, for example, uncovered the fact that this phrase, too, has significant this-worldly dimensions. The much-quoted John 3:16, which by that time had become oppressive to me, took on new and exciting possibilities.

ON THE LIBERAL side of the theological spectrum, Christians sometimes believe that the only meaning to be found in scripture is that given by individual interpreters. Seeing the failures of literalism, they reject the Bible’s relevance for moral and ethical matters. Increasingly the Bible sits on the shelf, no longer invoked for fear of proof-texting. As one Mennonite pastor wrote recently, “Biblical authority is a big issue. I find myself having to defend scripture in Sunday school from adults who have been Christians their whole lives. ... Somehow there needs to be a way past the idea that a literalistic understanding of scripture is the only one.”

In fact, informed biblical interpretation is not simply a matter of personal opinion, social location, or even theological or denominational commitment. It often surprises churchgoers to learn that biblical scholars across the Christian church spectrum share much in their understandings of scripture. While academic tools certainly don’t

## Without access to scholarly tools, many Christians are prone to misuse the Bible or to give up reading it entirely.

past century alone, misreadings of scripture have made the Bible a weapon in the hands of despots, a tool of perversion by church-going perpetrators of abuse, and a metaphorical club in the so-called culture wars. As Lisa Miller writes in a recent issue of *Newsweek*, “A person alone on her couch with scripture can ... come to some dangerous conclusions: The Bible has, at certain times in history, been read to support slavery, wife-beating, kidnapping, child abuse, racism, and polygamy.”

Radio preacher Harold Camping’s recent use of the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation to predict a specific “end times” date illustrates the point. More alarming than his errant preaching, however, was the fact that so many of his listeners lacked the interpretive tools necessary to discern between a solid reading of scripture and a shaky one.

Biblical misreadings of this sort might be entertaining if they were not so tragic. Lives are profoundly shaped by the religious convictions of public leaders. And too often, when scholarly tools for biblical interpretation are ignored, it is the most vulnerable who end up on the losing side of the interpretative equation.

BELIEVERS on both ends of the theological spectrum shy away from evaluating their methods of biblical interpretation.

Ordinary wisdom can emerge from study circles, youth groups, home fellowships, and a variety of settings where participants with a range of educational backgrounds share insights. Because so-called ordinary readers often bring a deep hunger to their Bible study, as de Wit points out, they are full of expectation and hope, and their capacity to learn from scripture is profound.

Furthermore, academic tools are no substitute for spiritually formative practices such as prayer and worship. Ancient practices such as *lectio divina* and Ignatian spiritual exercises, as well as biblical storytelling, intercultural Bible reading, and the use of the arts in Bible study are other ways to study scripture that deepen understanding and aid spiritual growth. New Testament scholar Dale B. Martin’s recently published *The Pedagogy of the Bible* rightly calls for seminaries to expand beyond historical-critical methods to include a variety of these pre-modern approaches.

Still, while Bible study is not only for academicians, expository tools do play a foundational role of in shedding light on the text. Discovering, for example, that “kingdom of heaven” in the gospel of Matthew is a parallel term for “kingdom of God” in Luke and Mark is interesting. Even more eye-opening is learning that Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience while Luke wrote for a Gentile one, and that “kingdom of heaven” is likely a euphemism



guarantee full agreement about the meanings of various biblical passages, there is much broader consensus among biblical scholars than among preachers and lay people.

When either the liberal or conservative tendency to ignore academic tools is taken to its logical conclusion, the Bible is stripped of its authority and relativism reigns. Both approaches deny the Bible objective meaning and its role as a key source of guidance for the church. In my denomination, both approaches have caused many church members, conservative and liberal, to embrace theological perspectives sharply at odds with Mennonite teaching.

The idea that there are “better” and “worse” ways to read and interpret scripture, then, isn’t academic snobbery, but rather evidence of a strong commitment to scripture as the Christian’s guide for faith and life. Without this commitment, the Bible has the potential to become a weapon in an endless

Continued on Page 46

## RESOURCES FOR BETTER BIBLE STUDY

**The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults**, by Christine Eaton Blair. Geneva Press, 2001.

**Roman House Churches for Today: A Practical Guide for Small Groups**, by Reta Halteman Finger. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007.

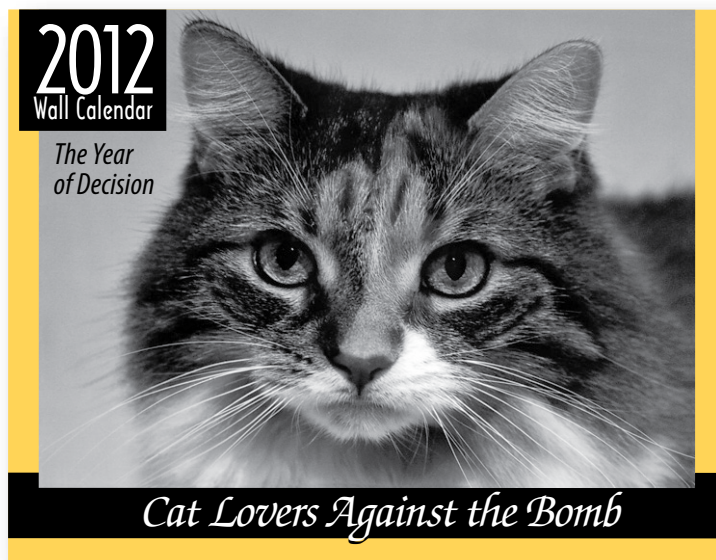
**Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction**, edited by Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray. Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

**Teaching the Bible Through Popular Culture and the Arts**, edited by Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray. Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

**Effective Bible Teaching**, by James C. Wilhoit and Leland Ryken. Baker Book House, 1988.

**Transforming Bible Study**, by Walter Wink. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009. —JGL

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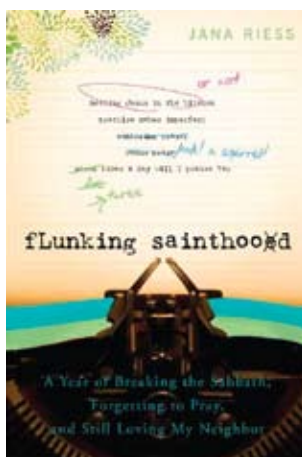
How to deepen our spirituality, one step at a time.

by BETSY SHIRLEY

**SENSING HER** spiritual life is lacking a certain oomph, Jana Riess tries an experiment: 12 spiritual practices in 12 months. Guided by the writings of folks such as Richard Foster, Phyllis Tickle, and Brother Lawrence, Riess attempts everything from centering prayer and fasting to *lectio divina* and welcoming the stranger. “We can’t really hear what God is saying, or let it sink into our souls and beings, until we have tried to *do* what God is saying,” she explains. “The practice precedes the belief, not the other way around.”

At least, that’s the theory. But as she chronicles in ***Flunking Sainthood: A Year of Breaking the Sabbath, Forgetting to Pray, and Still Loving my Neighbor*** (Paraclete Press), Riess’ crash course in spiritual discipline is punctuated by more flopping failure than soaring success. By the time her year is up, Riess concludes that her holy experiment was more “delusional” than ambitious.

Known to the Twitter community as “The Twible Lady” for tweeting the entire Bible in snarky, 140 character summaries (Proverbs 27: “As iron sharpens iron, so friends sharpen each other. Please note that this is only a metaphor. Do not carve your friends.”), Riess leavens the pages of *Flunking Sainthood* with the same delightful irreverence. Mincing no words, she calls St. Benedict “a crafty old coot” and St. Thérèse of Lisieux a “first-class diva.” She swears during silent meditation. And when trying to find God in the daily tasks of life, such as cleaning, Riess considers whether “a quicker route to genuine religious experience would be to snort



the spray cleaner and get high on fumes.”

*Flunking Sainthood* presents a lovely theology of failure. No, we are not always wrapped up in gushing ecstasies of Divine Love like St. Thérèse of Lisieux. And neither are we particularly patient when our feeble practice doesn’t produce instant “Eureka!” results. Somewhere amid Riess’ impatient and inconsistent efforts to implement each practice, there’s grace for all of us making fools of ourselves along our spiritual journeys (speaking

for myself, of course).

There’s grace for failure, but before trying any of this at home, consider reading ***Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love***, by Mark Scandrette (InterVarsity). With equal parts reflection and how-to, Scandrette invites readers to join “a path for discipleship that is more like a karate studio than a college lecture hall.”

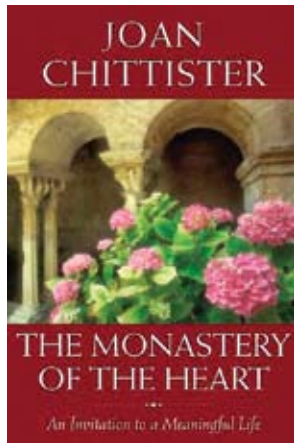
Unlike Riess, who’s an unabashed newcomer to spiritual practice, Scandrette has followed this hands-on, try-and-see sort of spiritual formation for years in his own communities, including ReIMAGINE—a center for spiritual practices he founded in San Francisco, emphasizing creativity, community, and social action. Hard-earned wisdom from these communities illustrates Scandrette’s reflections on spiritual formation, along with stories of their successes and failures.

For example, after studying the gospels, Scandrette and some friends started an experiment in security and abundance they dubbed “Have2Give1” in which they sold, donated, or



recycled half their possessions to benefit the world's poorest people. "Doing a tangible experiment took us out of our heads and into our bodies," writes Scandrette. "Gradually we came to realize that this kind of transformation is to be expected when we allow Jesus to be our Rabbi."

Though he hopes these tangible experiments will help us imagine a spirituality that goes beyond Bible studies and discussion groups, Scandrette doesn't minimize the importance of scripture. Echoing Riess on practice preceding belief, he writes: "the scriptures cannot be adequately understood apart from an honest attempt to apply them to the details of life ... The best goal for studying the scriptures is not to acquire connoisseur-level



attempts interior practices, she concludes she was an "idiot" for trying to learn spiritual practices solo: "Spiritual practices help the individual, sure," she writes, "but it takes a shtetl to raise a mensch."

Of course, to fully answer questions about inward and outward balance in our spiritual lives, it's best to consult the experts: monastics. In her newest book, **The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life** (Bluebridge), prolific author and Benedictine Joan Chittister begins with reflection: "After more than 50 years of life in a monastery," writes Chittister, "I have begun to sift and sort the effects of it all, asking myself, what—if anything—of monastic life is worth passing

## Chittister explains how Benedictine values can be applied to spiritual "seekers who stand in the midst of a seething, simmering world."

knowledge or complete understanding, but to gain the faith and inspiration to respond with obedience."

As a practical way to help readers "respond with obedience," Scandrette fills the second half of *Practicing the Way of Jesus* with a lexicon of ready-to-try experiments, including ideas for "classic" spiritual practices such as Sabbath-keeping, silent retreats, and foot-washing, but also some less-common ones, such as media fasts, looking into the eyes of everyone you meet, or administering a "gratitude and contentment survey."

Both *Practicing the Way of Jesus* and *Flunking Sainthood* briefly delve into the relationship between interior practices, such as prayer and contemplation, and practices that are more outward or communal, such as service and social activism. According to Scandrette, the church often thinks of spiritual practice only as "solitary introspection," forgetting that these contemplative practices "must be held in tension with the need for an active, communal pursuit of the way of Jesus." And though Riess herself mostly

on to others in this day and age."

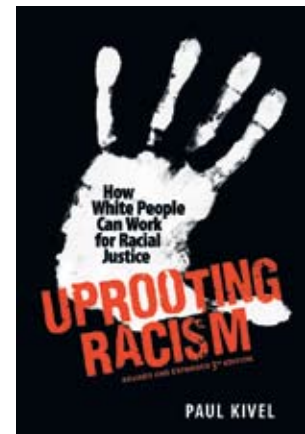
As in many others of her well-loved books, Chittister explains how Benedictine values such as prayerful reading, good work, conversion of heart, and hospitality can be applied not only to life within a monastery, but also to spiritual "seekers who stand in the midst of a seething, simmering world." What's different about *Monastery of the Heart* is how Chittister has cleared away excess thoughts to produce pared-down prose that is almost prayer-like in form and tone.

"We do not all hear the same tones at the same volume, or see the same visions in the same colors, or seek the same goods of life in the same way," she writes. "The search for God depends, then, on choosing the spiritual path most suited to our own spiritual temper and character." And whether we're saints or spiritual flunks, that seems like pretty good advice. ■

*Betsy Shirley, a former Sojourners editorial assistant, teaches English to refugees at Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia.*



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## Action Heroes

**When spurred on by God and conscience, there's no telling what trouble you might get into.** *by JULIE POLTER*

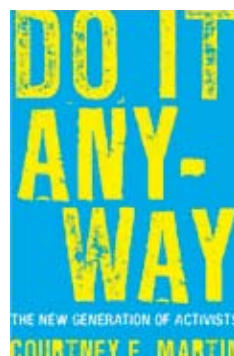
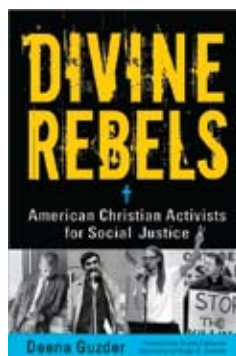
### AS THE VOLUME

of campaign rhetoric and debates around the proper relationship between religion and politics rises, I'm reminded that I'm not very inspired to action or service or public engagement by speeches or even impassioned arguments.

What I want are stories: real stories about real people, profiles in courage (that sometimes falters), testimonies of doubt and failure and perseverance. Don't tell me about how faith has a role in the public square—show me faith in action, whether religious faith or simply a hunger to right a wrong or defend the defenseless that transcends mere strategic or policy considerations. Here are a few books that do just that.

In the introduction to **Divine Rebels: American Christian Activists for Social Justice** (Lawrence Hill Books), author Deena Guzder writes that her book “articulates a forward-thinking, faith-based alternative to both the conservative talking heads that warp religion as well as the political left's alienating cynicism.” This “beyond Left and Right, fundamentalist and staunchly secular” approach might sound overly familiar to many *Sojourners* readers, as might some of her profiled subjects, which include Daniel Berrigan and Shane Claiborne.

But these engaging and detailed profiles are a pleasure, lifting up some lesser-known figures and bringing fresh perspective to the more famous subjects. Guzder illuminates the role faith plays in leading regular people to often



extraordinary risks and commitments, from risking death as a Freedom Rider to fighting the death penalty for the murderer of a loved one. Perhaps because Guzder, an independent journalist, writes from outside of Christianity, she does not inadvertently

slip into generic peace-and-justice rhetoric, but rather lifts up the influences (people, scripture, mystical experiences) and voices unique to each of her subjects.

*Divine Rebels* also serves as an introduction to activist movements including the Plowshares disarmament efforts, war tax resistance, environmental justice, and the sanctuary movement. It is worth noting that eight of 10 people profiled are white men—inspirational stories all, but not as representative of the church or of religious activism as might be ideal.

RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION is *not* a theme of **Do It Anyway: The New Generation of Activists** (Beacon Press), by Courtney E. Martin. And yet I found this book to be a great complement to *Divine Rebels*, in part because both are collections of well-written, inspiring profiles of people who are deeply called to make a difference in the world. But *Do It Anyway* also brings needed diversity to the table—not just in its focus on younger activists, but in highlighting mainly women and people of color and exploring how vocations in social work, the arts, and teaching can also be channels for activism.

As a preface to the other profiles, Martin starts with Rachel Corrie, a young woman



crushed by an Israeli bulldozer while trying to defend a Palestinian home from demolition in 2003. Martin refutes those who would characterize Corrie as either a martyr or as a naive pawn, instead focusing on Corrie's sincere desire for "one good thing I can do." But Martin also warns of "how deeply false the romance of young death really is" and how it serves to simplify the activist calling. Instead, she asserts that it's among those still alive and wrestling with the ambiguities and complications of living a life of meaning that we might find deeper inspiration.

Martin's subjects range from prison reentry social worker Raul Diaz, working in the same tough L.A. neighborhood he grew up in, to filmmaker Emily Abt, a daughter of privilege from Cambridge, Massachusetts. Martin portrays the very different struggles, personalities, and stories of how they came to their callings and where they might lead in the future with warmth, but also honesty. These aren't polished, off-the-shelf saints, but real people still figuring things out. I appreciated the fact that while I can admire all eight people profiled, I didn't agree with all of their approaches or opinions.

**Prophetic Activism: Progressive Religious Justice Movements in Contemporary America** (NYU Press), by Helene Slessarev-Jamir, is a little more academic than the previous two books, and isn't focused on the stories of individuals. But Slessarev-Jamir's case studies of five religious justice movements (faith-based community organizing, the worker justice movement, immigrant rights, religious peacemaking, and global justice advocacy) provides an informed context for understanding some of the very concrete ways people of faith are at work in the world, and the hope that this work bears. She writes, "Prophetic approaches allow activists to ground their present actions, no matter how difficult or even life-threatening, in a vision of hope for a transformed future in which justice will be realized, right relations between nations restored, and peace ushered in." Rooted in scripture and transcendent faith, and defying the staid expectations of analysts and pundits—this is why faithful activism will always be more interesting than a candidates' debate. ■

*Julie Polter is an associate editor of Sojourners.*

## MORE BOOKS ON FAITH IN MOTION

### **A Dangerous Dozen: 12 Christians Who Threatened the Status Quo but Taught us to Live Like Jesus,**

by C.K. Robertson. Skylight Paths. The title is awkward, but these short pieces on figures ranging from Mary Magdalene to Chinese Christian leader K.H. Ting are user-friendly and manage to fit in some of the ambiguities in these individuals' witnesses. The questions for discussion and suggestions for further reading make this a potential resource for an adult Sunday school or small group series.

### **Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition,**

by Dan McKanan. Beacon Press. While noting that there are tensions within the Left between secularist and faith-based activists, McKanan asserts that ultimately religion (from Christianity to neo-paganism) has been intertwined with radical activism for liberty, equality, solidarity, and peace throughout U.S. history. This survey ranges through the 19th and 20th centuries and gives a valuable historical grounding for both activists and social change observers.

### **All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time,**

by Robert Ellsberg. The Crossroad Publishing Company. First published in 1997, this reader of 365 short biographies of traditional saints and contemporary witnesses continues to be an excellent way to get a daily dose of inspirational and challenging life stories. —JP

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## José Peñate Aceves

*Bio:* Directs Christian communities in San Francisco and Oakland, California, as a part of InnerCHANGE, a coalition of communities of missionaries living in marginalized neighborhoods. *Website:* [www.innerchange.org](http://www.innerchange.org)

Celda Aceves

**1 What led you to start an intentional community ministering to gang members?** Gangs have a really strong sense of community: They fight and die for their homies and they support each other. Other programs offer job skills or anger management, but don't offer community. We offer a community like the community they have. After many years working with them, we realized that was attractive to them—they feel at home.



**2 Why is local leadership so important in your work?** From the beginning we said that if we really want this ministry to continue, it has to be local, because local leaders have three different qualities. a) They don't move easily. b) Other people trust them; it takes time, but people believe them. And c) they're used to handling big challenges—poor or marginalized people have been trained by life to confront really huge challenges.

**3 What does it mean to minister "incarnationally"?** If someone foreign wants to do some kind of ministry in this community, that person has to become like a baby and learn. Transformation is mutual: At the same time it's helping others, the biggest transformation is happening in their own life. That is not easy. To submerge incarnationally and empower others sometimes is to fail. But if you look through the eyes of the kingdom of God, well, that is all about love, love, love—until they ask you why you love so much.

**4 How have you seen scripture reflected in the communities where you've lived?** In El Salvador, Luke 4:18-19—Jesus' commission to free the oppressed—helped me to see my poor community with a different perspective. Our neighborhood was so poor: no electricity, no streets, no water. We thought this was our destiny. But through the gospel we find that, no, God has beautiful promises and we can do it together. Sometimes poor people

are so divided, just trying to survive themselves, that we don't realize that together we can transform the whole community.

**5 You recently began a new InnerCHANGE community in Oakland. What does that look like?** We have not defined a ministry yet; in the first phase we just live in the neighborhood. My team leader is going and playing soccer, because soccer gathers young people. We are going to different churches, trying to sense the spirituality of the city. We're volunteering with programs that are serving the poor to understand what they do, how they do it, and the spirituality behind that. And we are trying to sense how power works in this city—city power: police, judges, juvenile justice. We are not in a hurry. We are trying to understand it but, beyond that, feel it. What do we feel God is doing here?

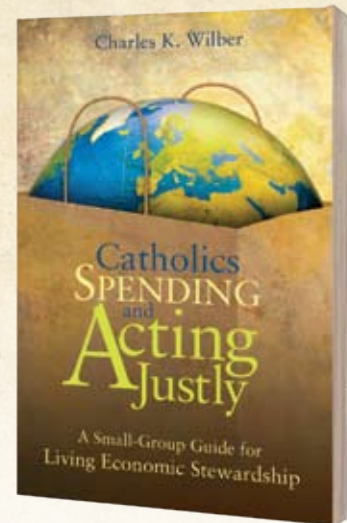
**6 What gives you hope in the work that you do?** God's promises of the eternal life. But until then, God is working in this city. I believe that God is working in these young people, and if I believe in God's promises, automatically, without saying anything, they will understand that they can do it too. These young people don't always listen to your words, but they really learn through influence. So that is my hope: These young people are changing, little by little. ■

*Betsy Shirley, a former Sojourners editorial assistant, teaches English to refugees at Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia.*

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We all knew it would come.  
Someday. Always later.  
*Mañana.*  
It comes for us all. Sure.  
Of course.  
We know that. Someday.  
*Mañana.*

But when someday draws near  
for someone you love  
whose silenced breath sears  
your lungs with flames of grief  
and sobs so immense  
you wonder:  
How dare the sun ascend?  
The stars to shine?  
Even the yeast to rise!

*Who authorized the Earth to turn another inch?  
Gravity itself should be suspended,  
and the new moon halt in midair  
with its ghostly light exposing  
every predator's stare.*

All words—every syllable—fail and flail about  
as if comfort answers to incantation,  
as if death leaves no bruise,  
as if sorrow can be *shhushhed* away like  
crows from the cornfield.

Only flesh on flesh can convey  
the pledge, to shivering hands and quivering hearts,  
the implausible news that dust is not the end.  
Only cheek to cheek,  
and mingled tears,  
chase back fears  
to their perdition haunt.

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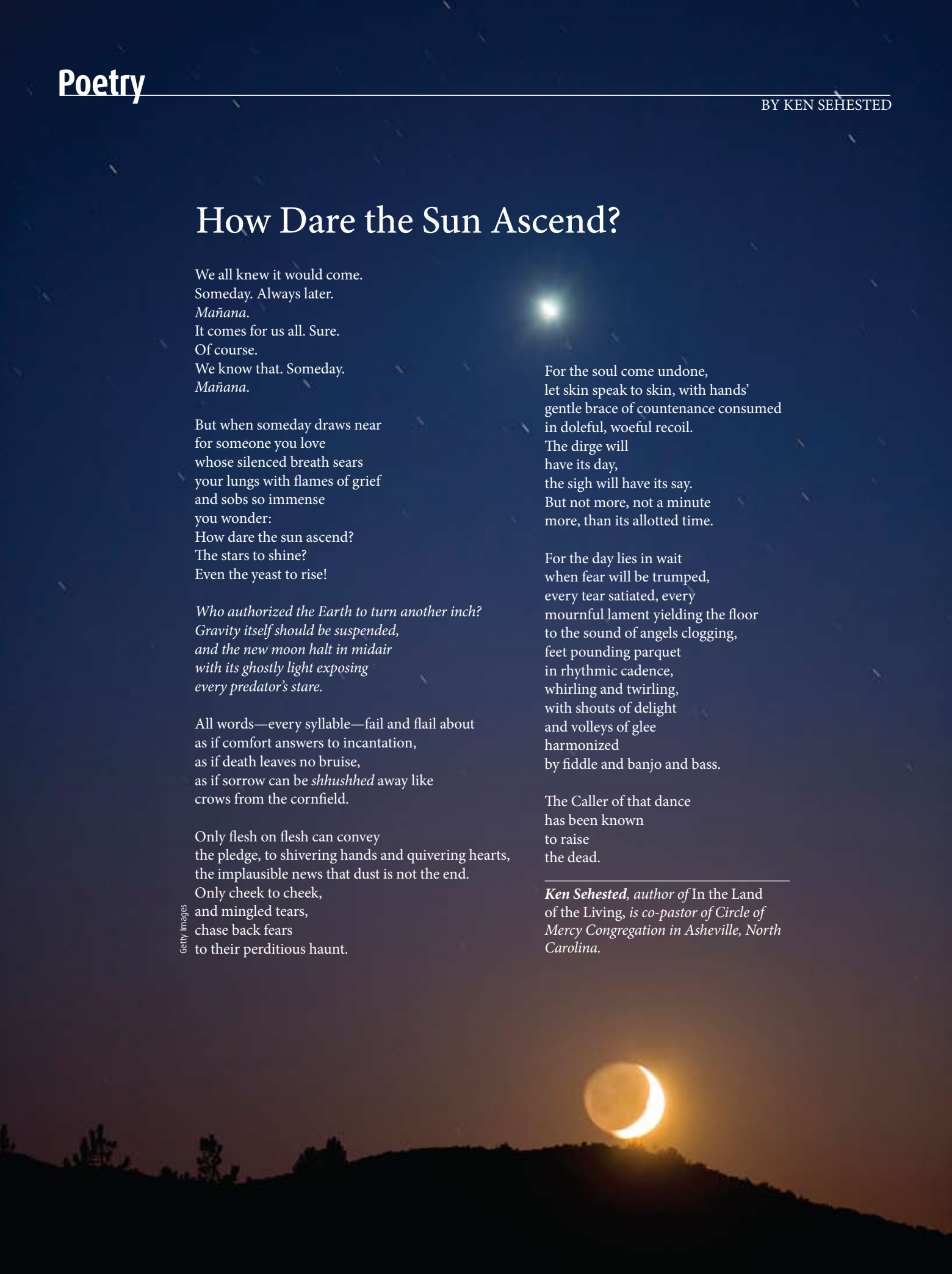
For the soul come undone,  
let skin speak to skin, with hands'  
gentle brace of countenance consumed  
in doleful, woeful recoil.  
The dirge will  
have its day,  
the sigh will have its say.  
But not more, not a minute  
more, than its allotted time.

For the day lies in wait  
when fear will be trumped,  
every tear satiated, every  
mournful lament yielding the floor  
to the sound of angels clogging,  
feet pounding parquet  
in rhythmic cadence,  
whirling and twirling,  
with shouts of delight  
and volleys of glee  
harmonized  
by fiddle and banjo and bass.

The Caller of that dance  
has been known  
to raise  
the dead.

---

**Ken Sehested**, author of *In the Land of the Living*, is co-pastor of *Circle of Mercy Congregation* in Asheville, North Carolina.



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## Bridging the Bible Gap

Continued from Page 39

battle between ideologues or to remain on the shelf as a relic of the past, functionally absent in the lives of congregations.

At a conference I attended, a common set of questions emerged: "How do we read the Bible well, and to whom do we look to tell us that we've read it well? And who can take the authority to make it so?" While scholarly tools for biblical interpretation cannot take the place of other formational practices, I believe they can help us address these questions and claim the Bible's authority in our lives.

Bridging the gap between seminary and congregation—between biblical scholars and ordinary people who care about the Bible—requires a change of mindset. All of us—church leaders, biblical scholars, and people in the pew—will need to believe and behave as if scholarly tools for biblical interpretation *matter* in the church. As James Smart, a professor of biblical interpretation at Union Theological Seminary in New York in the 1960s and '70s, wrote in *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, we share responsibility for the gap:

*The primary source of the Bible's failure to maintain its place in the life of the church and in the lives of Christian people is a multiple breakdown in communication: between biblical scholars and those responsible for preaching and teaching, between preachers and people, and, not least, between the separate departments into which the faculty of a theological seminary is divided.*

We must *together*, as seminary and church, reimagine the place of biblical scholarship in the life of the church. We must get out of our ecclesial and academic camps and into mutually beneficial relationships that honor the knowledge and expertise each of us brings to the interpretive task. We must learn best practices from churches where members are engaged with scripture and regularly use interpretive tools, and from seminaries where pastors are being prepared to equip lay people for responsible study of scripture. Churches and seminaries working in isolation in regard to Bible teaching has not served us well. A new direction, charted together, is needed. ■

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## Food for Life

**THE DOCUMENTARY** film *Forks Over Knives* is saddled with the worst title I've seen in decades. It also suffers from a severe case of moderation and reasonableness in a culture in which ignorant extremism usually carries the day. This is too bad, because the movie happens to tell a story that holds at least half the answer to America's health-care crisis.

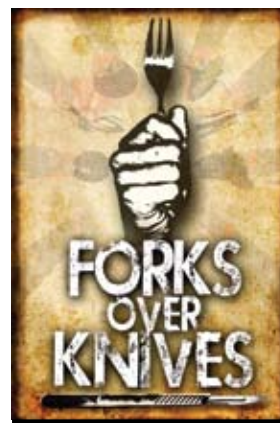
The makers of *Forks Over Knives* are here to tell us that many of our most common, and expensive, diseases—diabetes, heart disease, even some cancers—are the result of a bad diet. The film follows several individual patients, including the director, Lee Fulkerson, who suffer from multiple chronic ailments. They come under the care of a doctor who prescribes a radically low-fat, plant-based regimen of whole grains, legumes, fresh produce, and exercise. Within months all of the patients, director included, have shed dozens of pounds, cancelled their many costly prescriptions, and rendered redundant the army of medical

by training, was working with a group of heart patients whom the clinic's cardiologists had essentially given up for dead. He placed them on a low-fat, all-plant diet, with astounding results.

I can testify to the truth of this movie's claims. Several years ago, a friend convinced me to go hear a lecture by Esselstyn.

This friend had been following an all-plant diet for years after a frightening brush with colon cancer. Our whole family went to hear the doctor, on a broiling summer afternoon, at Louisville's minor league baseball stadium. For months afterward our kids delighted in mimicking the doctor's Ivy League diction as he denounced the "toxic American diet."

But a few years later, I began to take his advice seriously. In



do everything possible to avoid being split open again. I never took the cholesterol meds they gave me, but I said goodbye to fried chicken, glazed ham, and sausage biscuits. Within a few months, my cholesterol reading had dropped 50 points.

So, if many of those stents and bypasses and expensive prescription drugs could be avoided with a change of diet, why are we still sinking in health-care-induced debt? Well, there are powerful interests threatened by the dietary approach. The beef and dairy industries are major supporters of nutrition and agriculture research, and of farm-state politicians. The medical-industrial complex of hospitals and pharmaceutical companies also has a vested interest in promoting surgical interventions and lifelong dependence on expensive drugs.

This is where *Forks Over Knives*' weakness for reason and moderation becomes a vice. Representatives of these opposing interest groups are interviewed respectfully, when the kind of public humiliation Michael Moore doles out to his documentary victims might have been more effective. Some day the purveyors of "the toxic American diet" will be looked upon with the disdain now reserved for tobacco company executives. *Forks Over Knives* serves as early warning. ■

## Much medical intervention could be avoided with a change of diet. So why are we still sinking in health-care-induced debt?

specialists, technicians, and health insurance bureaucrats they had formerly employed.

*Forks Over Knives* is based on research by Cornell University professor T. Colin Campbell and Cleveland Clinic physician Caldwell Esselstyn Jr. Campbell was one of the lead researchers for the China-Cornell-Oxford Project, a study of diet and health that tracked 6,500 people over two decades and found hundreds of statistically significant associations between the consumption of animal protein and the occurrence of heart disease and cancer. Meanwhile, at the Cleveland Clinic, Esselstyn, an endocrinologist

spring 2007, I learned that I needed open-heart surgery to replace a congenitally defective aortic valve. I'd already had repair surgery on this valve when I was 10. Before the surgery, the cardiologist checked my coronary arteries to see if I would need any bypasses while my sternum was broken and my rib cage opened up. They found troublesome plaque in one artery; no need for bypass, they said, but I would need to go on cholesterol-lowering medication. That's when I drank the plant-based Kool-Aid. After enduring my second heart surgery and recovery, I vowed that I would



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## With the Eyes of Our Hearts

**THE JOURNEY OF** faith is long and full of forked roads. Every attempt at faithful living is a response to God's initial invitation. But the life of faith will always require certain choices. We have personal and communal responsibilities to live into. Do we choose to be foolish or wise, living prepared lives or unprepared lives, sleeping through God's activity or wide awake and ready to join in God's work? Every day we choose between life and death, recalling God's steadfastness, relying on God's grace, and remembering God's justice.

An eschatological thread runs through this month's texts. We celebrate the end of the liturgical year on the feast of Christ the King. We begin a season of active preparation for the coming of God, while at the same time God is actively calling out the faithful. God chooses us. But our choices matter as well. How do we choose to respond in faith to the life God continually offers us? What do we worship? What do we choose to remember? Where do we choose to place our hope?

Often when we hear the word "choice" we also hear the word "individual." However, to choose wisely means putting our focus on the wider community. Choosing wisely means recognizing our status as "children of light" (1 Thessalonians 5:5) and constantly negotiating within varied contexts what it means to live in the light of Christ.



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[ NOVEMBER 6 ]

## Bound to Serve

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 70; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

**ONE COULD ARGUE** that it is in our nature to enslave ourselves to something. The question is more a matter of "to what" than "if." Joshua, being an astute leader of his people, was very aware of the temptation to enslave oneself to everything besides the

## Power brings responsibility.

God of Israel. Choosing the ways of God will always mean saying no multiple times to a variety of cultural and societal options. Like the Israelites reflecting on how to live faithfully in the land, we too must be deliberate and intentional with our decision-making process. Faithful leadership such as that of Joshua will call us to think deliberately about what we worship, whom we follow, and for what reasons. How have those to whom we give our allegiance proven themselves as sources of life? How does the manner in which we live speak to a hope rooted in Christ—and a hope that trusts that life in

Christ always prevails over what leads to death (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)?

It's worth reflecting on the context in which we even think about the notion of choice. The text from Joshua speaks into a landed and somewhat secure community.

The Israelites are known to the neighboring people for their military might. The former nomadic children of Israel now have their daily needs met and countless extra resources that may blur their memory.

How are our own choices different depending on our socio-economic realities and military capabilities? Counting the cost of discipleship should include an awareness of God's character, which includes both mercy and judgment. It should also include an awareness of God's expectations for us to have lives awakened to and expecting God's presence (Matthew 25:1-13). As creatures made to worship God, we are bound to serve something. The choice of whether or not we bind ourselves to God is ours.

[ NOVEMBER 13 ]

## Discerning the Days

Judges 4:1-7; Psalm 90:1-12;  
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

**"TEACH US TO** count our days that we may gain a wise heart" says the psalmist (Psalm 90:12). This psalm, attributed to Moses, is almost a plea for the Israelites (and us) to remember that they are creatures and God is almighty Creator. Like the Israelites in Judges, we too have a history of following other gods. The prophet Deborah was judging a different generation from that in the book of Joshua. This new generation had apparently forgotten what it meant to serve the Lord (Judges 4:1). The sad reality is that we too often commit to God and then backslide into old habits and unfaithful ways. These passages are a necessary and gracious reminder that there is always room on the journey of faith to reassess and recommit our lives to the ways of God. The Thessalonians text rightfully urges us to encourage one another in the challenging daily task of living by faith, love, and hope.

It seems essential to reflect on the communal aspects of Paul's letter. As children of light who find hope in what Christ has already done for us, we are called to help one another remember our identity and to use that knowledge to choose faithfulness to the life of God. We fall into carelessness and eventually into sin when we choose to live as though we do not know who and whose we are. Discerning our times means being attentive to and aware of our environment, the political and social climate, and the spiritual dis-ease that often lurks beneath the surface.

The gospel parable of the master and servants further highlights God's odd sense of trust and patience toward us. Like the servants, we are entrusted with so much more than we often know what to do with. I have to wonder if we fail to invest God's gifts wisely because we truly forget who the giver is and what God's work is about. In the parable the master goes away for a "long time" (Matthew 25:19), leaving ample opportunity for the servants to choose wisely what they will do with what they have been entrusted with. Our choices have consequences, and the master will not be gone forever.



[ NOVEMBER 20 ]

## Hope is in the Details

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 95:1-7a;  
Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

**POWER BRINGS** responsibility. Whenever we find ourselves in positions of power, we have to recall how Christ the King, whose feast we celebrate, used power. Ezekiel offers a glimpse of what abuse of power looks like. The text picks up after God has listed the multiple ways the Israelite leaders have failed their people. They have not cared for and encouraged those most in need, but have cared only for themselves. When in power it can be so easy to believe that we can get away with injustice. But power without wisdom and hope will ultimately lead to abuse and eventually will be called to account. Thankfully, or unfortunately, depending on how you have wielded the power afforded you, God will not stand aside when God's children are denied the care and provision that are rightfully theirs.

Psalm 95 reminds us that God is the primary shepherd, the sovereign we are called to worship with how we live, including our actions toward others. There is a quiet, steady undertow throughout these passages that alludes to our hope being in God's self in Christ Jesus. Even within the land, with military might, with abundant provisions, the true dwelling place is in God. If life is in the details, then the bottom-line detail is God. It is to this that Paul desires that the eyes of our hearts be enlightened (Ephesians 1:18).

Any notion we have of power must be rooted in the inherent power of hope that raised Christ from the dead. How we live into the power we are given directly correlates to how we live into our hope in Christ. This hope compels us to love one another and care for one another the way Christ the King cares for all God's children. And here's the shocker: The love of Christ shows no distinction. The sheep in Matthew's gospel are recognized by God because they extended love for love's own sake, not for merit, or recognition, or because they judged Christ present in the other. Christ is always present when we extend love. Serving others is how Christ the King has chosen to live into his sovereign power.

[ NOVEMBER 27 ]

## The Gift is Still Unfolding

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19;  
1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

**IT IS THE FIRST** Sunday of the "waiting season." In Advent we are called to stay awake, to keep alert (Mark 13:33-37). Though we already have so much for which to be grateful to God in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:4), we cannot get complacent or overly satisfied with the way things are. We have a tendency to want to make do with our half-hearted attempts at faithful living.

We so easily and readily blur the lines between what is entrusted to us and what we are called to worship. Land, for example, is a gift. Spiritual knowledge is a gift. But God's gifts do not replace God. Nor do they put us into the role of God. It is fitting to begin Advent with the voice of a prophet such as Isaiah, who is clear about the current situation of his people. They have broken their covenant with God. They have failed to remember God's ways. Paul points to the same thing in his letter to the Corinthians. They may have spiritual gifts, but just after the selected pericope we see that they have lost focus. Instead of encouraging one another, they quarrel. Paul reminds them of the primary thing, the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

As Mark's gospel text suggests, a crucial part of being prepared and keeping awake (Mark 13:28-29) is reading what Matthew calls "the signs of the times" (16:3). We must be alert to what is happening in the culture around us *and* to what is going on within our own spiritual lives as a community. Where is there a discrepancy between how God calls us to live and what we are actually doing to one another? How are we remembering to draw on the grace of God, to pray for restoration and mercy like the psalmist? How are we living into the hope and promise of Christ's return by preparing a place and a people that the Lord might actually recognize as God's own? ■

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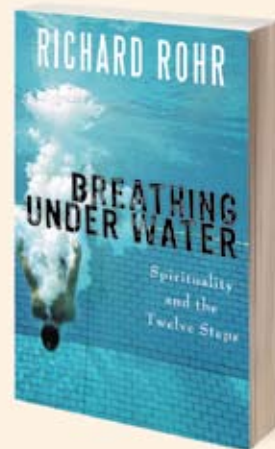
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## But We Don't Look a Day Over 38

**WITH THIS ISSUE** we turn 40, as our cover notes. It's also discussed in two articles, a column, and our editor's page, not to mention the balloons. You couldn't throw a dart at this magazine without being reminded of the fact that we're 40 years old. We've been around the block a few times. Crow's feet are appearing at the corners of our eyes, and we just ordered an ear-hair trimmer off eBay. (Although as a rule one probably shouldn't buy previously owned tools for personal hygiene. These things often come with a history that we'd probably rather not know. But I digress.)

Fortunately, 40 is the new 34, or in my case, 38.

I showed up at the magazine two years after it all started, which is why I'm still known as The New Guy. Most of the editorial staff have been



Ken Davis

out with Twitter, or texts if more comprehensive instructions are needed. ("Put down your nets, and I will make you fishers of men. LOL." Andrew and Simon Peter, tweeting back: "Um ... would you repeat that? Backslash, backslash, smiley face.")

At any rate, it was a good thing God had a new plan for my life, because two years later that newspaper job was terminated. Sometimes,

A lot has happened since our first issue in 1971, but mainly in the last few months, because that's easier to remember. During that long-ago era (this summer), the forces of greed we've been writing against for decades almost brought down the U.S. economy, and we're trying not to say we told you so. After all, we preached, we published, we blogged, we emailed, we put out study guides, we led public vigils. Heck, I even played guitar outside the White House before getting arrested for either a powerful act of civil disobedience or for singing in front of police officers who weren't in the mood.

In short, we've been prayerfully bearing witness against the principalities of unregulated capitalism for many years, but did the nation LISTEN?! Nope. To be fair, after decades of excess, the U.S. *does* have more rich people than any other country, and the 99 percent of us who aren't rich are VERY proud of that fact. Because our rich people can beat up their rich people [high five].

Regardless, we'll keep fighting for a peaceful world for another 40 years, because who can afford to retire? *Wait.* That's not what I meant to say. I mean we must always have hope, because hope, as the expression goes, springs a turtle. (How that helps, I'm not sure, but some people find it inspirational.) ■

*Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.*

## Four decades of keeping faith. Okay, maybe not on this page.

here nearly as long. In fact, our collective term of service at *Sojourners* adds up to more than 100 years. Which means that if we lay down in the hall, end to end, it would once again test the patience of the UPS guy, who would have to maneuver around us to deliver those packages that are so important to the mission of *Sojourners* (although to be honest most of them are from eBay).

WHEN GOD CALLED me to *Sojourners*, I was the art director of the *Chicago Sun-Times* Sunday magazine, a publication whose future was limited only by the fact that nobody read it. It was a short call from God, if memory serves, kind of like a tweet, only without the backslashes. (At least I think it was God speaking to me. I heard this still small voice, but it could have been the guy in the elevator whose foot I was standing on.) Today God probably reaches

when God calls, it's a good vocational move.

But secular journalism wasn't all I was leaving behind. God also lured me away from a life of strong liquor, fast cars, and immense wealth. Fortunately for God, I was in the early planning stages of that life, so it wasn't difficult to leave my third-floor walk-up efficiency and do something that wasn't interrupted every 16 minutes by the dish-rattling sound of a passing elevated train. Not so much a "put down your nets" moment as a "put down your *TV Guide*."

I still remember my parents' reaction when I told them I was leaving my job at a newspaper with a circulation of nearly a million to work at a magazine whose subscriber list fit into a single shoebox. There was a palpable sense of pride when they replied, "Would you repeat that?"



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